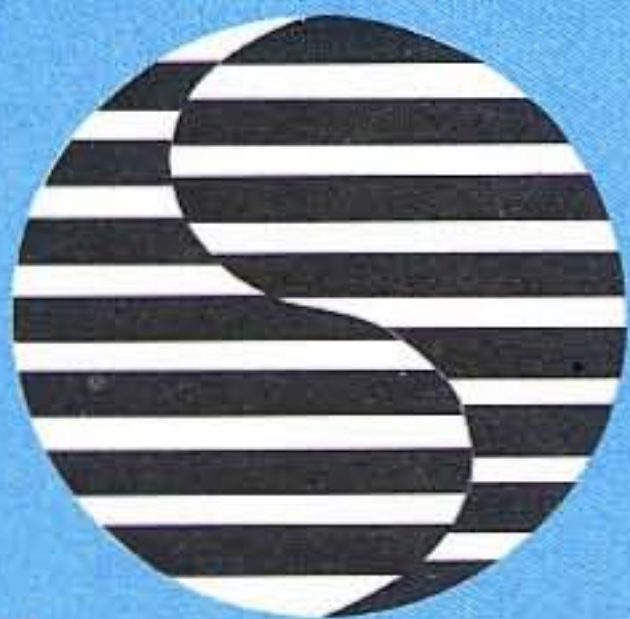


Documentation Update

2005-06



Equations

*Our Note***■ HOW CREDIBLE IS "INCREDIBLE INDIA!"? ■****Making a mark on the international tourism map**

The final report published in Feb, 06 of the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) for India prepared by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) for the Ministry of Tourism provides insights into the role of tourism in Indian economy. The report emphasizes that Indian tourism has come of age and is internationally comparable and credible. Global recognition to Indian tourism has been accorded by the 73rd session of Executive Council of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) where Secretary General, Francesco Frangialli, praising the country's tourism policy and the "Incredible India" campaign, said that he hoped the country would record the highest growth rate in tourist arrivals by the end of this year. India's tourist arrival growth rate in 04-05 of 13%, matching that of China's, has upgraded India's position as a preferred tourism destination in Asia. India's status in the world tourism scenario was further enhanced when it was unanimously elected as a member of the Executive Council of the UNWTO. Financially too, tourism has become a priority sector at the central and state levels. The plan allocation for tourism sector at the central government level has increased from Rs. 786 crores in 2005-06 to Rs.830 crores in 2006-07, out of which 422.5 crores is for the development of tourism infrastructure alone.

The 'Incredible India' campaign and extensive promotional initiatives of the Indian Government in tourism has been attributed as a key reason for India's positioning as an important tourism player. There has been a significant expansion of the Incredible India campaign and it has come to include several more states and regions under its focus. The campaign has also resulted in states competing with each other for central budgetary allocations and hiring national and international consultants to promote tourist destinations more aggressively, incorporating new rhetoric and concepts such as ecotourism, farm tourism, rural tourism and other such forms. In the light of the growing success of Indian tourism internationally, even greater emphasis has been laid on "high value, low volume" tourism in some of the states- the rationale of such assumption being that high value tourism will induce development of high end infrastructure with added financial gains through tourism revenues.

In its bid to continuously improvise and take new shapes and forms to attract all kinds of clientele – the latest buzzword is medical tourism. The trend is of promoting different cities such as Hyderabad, Bangalore and Delhi as hubs for medical tourism to attract international patients into large private-run hospitals that offer specialized medical services at prices much lower than international standards. The 'greet and treat' concept is integral to this new idea. The central Tourism Ministry is participating at the Medical Tourism Expo in the UK in June 2006 to showcase the medical facilities available in India. Although foreigners and NRIs coming to India for treatment is not a recent trend, the last few years have seen the Tourism Department leveraging this trend to package it as a new tourism product of "Medical Tourism" with simplified visa procedures for international patients being outlined prominently in the national tourism website.

Flying high – tourism and the aviation sector boom in India

The tremendous boom in the aviation industry 2005-06 has resulted in better connectivity between tourism destinations all over the country. There has been a growing trend of low cost private airlines aggressively entering the market. The sectors, which were considered economically non viable earlier (like North East and Andaman) are now well connected even by private airlines. Our section C24 – civil aviation highlights this trend. It is expected that domestic tourism sector will witness an upward growth with air travel no longer a privileged mode of transport for the social and economic elite. Entry of new players has not only led to aggressive price wars but the adoption of novel marketing strategies by airlines to attract customers. One such strategy in particular chooses to highlight its female staff on board as "models in the air". The booming aviation sector has also brought in additional proposals of the modernization and privatization of airports at major India cities – a move which saw vehement challenge by workers unions but which the central government is determined to see through.

Business as usual

For the last 50 years, mining, dam projects and industries continue to feed voraciously on natural resource rich areas and be major threats to indigenous and local communities, and the environment. The threats from these developments have been visible enough and have generated immense resistance from adivasi communities across states. Tourism too, is gradually and subtly penetrating tribal areas using forests, water and tribal culture as potential products. In 2005 the Government of India introduced the Forest Rights Bill, which for the first time recognized the rights of forest dwelling communities over their resources. However since its introduction in Parliament, 9 months and three parliamentary sessions later, no decision has been taken yet on its status. Significant opposition to its tabling has been from a section of 'conservationists and wildlife experts' who have contested the bill on the grounds that granting more rights to indigenous and local communities over forest lands would result in biodiversity loss and habitat change. Simultaneously the very same Government has, in a rather sneaky manner, brought back Schedule V and VI areas within the ambit of the country's commitments under WTO agreements like the GATS with no stakeholder consultation. With the already rampant privatization of common property resources in these areas, exposure to the GATS and the following investment in service sectors will increase the threat being faced by indigenous communities. Tourism being an important service sector will have a free reign, without being accountable for its adverse impacts.

No longer a colluder but a key facilitator in the process of non-participatory development- is the central government with the star role being played by the Ministry of Environment and Forests – MoEF. The Ministry is on a drive to do away with even the meager protection that current environmental laws offer to suit the needs and demands of industry giants. As part of India's commitments to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) was prepared in 2002 through a consultative process but has not been approved to date. The reason quoted is that it is 'unscientific.' The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification first issued in 1994 was withdrawn and EIA for tourism has been removed in the new draft Notification. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification issued in 1991, first diluted by tourism lobby that wanted a free entry into coastal stretches has been amended 20 times to date – with each amendment further diluting its provisions. But now the MoEF has decided to replace the CRZ Notification with a management plan. These well orchestrated changes at the policy and legal spaces has effectively given tourism a holiday from accountability and is business as usual with no pretensions of a tint of green.

As we go into press with this issue of the DocUpdate, policy battlelines are being drawn on SEZ, on Rehabilitation and Resettlement policies, and trying to ensure that the hard fought Right to Information is not diluted.

As people continue to fight and struggle...

With a development model that is clearly not in favour of the majority of its people but oriented to suit the needs of the country's social and economic elite, communities and affected people have come together in their fight to reclaim democracy and the right to determine their form and pace of development. The past year has seen many a struggle - by the adivasis of Kalinga Nagar against the mining plans of industry giant Tata on their lands; by the people of Chattisgarh to reclaim the right over their river water which was callously sold away, by the people of the Northeast against state oppression, militarization and an imposed model of development fuelled by money and support from international institutions like the World Bank and ADB; by farmers from across the country protesting in Hong Kong against the WTO-induced trade regime in agriculture that threatens the livelihoods of millions in India and other farming countries; by the villagers of Plachimada against Coca Cola to stop the cola giant from using and contaminating the water of the village; by the slum dwellers of India's burgeoning metropolises to fight for space and the right to live with dignity; by the bar girls of Mumbai to retain their right to work and feed their families. As the poor, under-privileged and socially marginalized continue to fight, the government has not only continued to endorse such an anti-people development model but has used its state and military power to suppress voices of opposition and rebellion. The current form of tourism development is a component of this paradigm that continues to support the privileged without tending to the needs and aspirations of communities which has and will continue to inspire campaigns towards a more just and democratic model.

This issue of the DocUpdate covers the period April 2005 to March 2006. The information included is indicative, tracing tourism, development and other broader issues, with the focus being largely on India. The information

is organised and presented based according to the sections and sub-sections of EQUATIONS documentation centres classification code. The data at the end of each item indicates the source. Please refer to the source index for abbreviations used.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Ms Nina Rao (Delhi), Bailancho Saad (Goa) and Citizen, Consumer and Civic Action Group (Chennai) for providing us with clippings and reports.

Notwithstanding the delay in bringing this issue to you, we hope you find it useful and informative. We would appreciate receiving feedback about the DocUpdate. Please write to us at info@equitabletourism.org

EQUATIONS Team
November 2006

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■ A – TOURISM AND TOURISM ALTERNATIVES ■

A00 Tourism, Travel

Destination tourism is a crashing bore. To the globetrotter, Paris, New York, Dubai, Singapore, even the Alps, is so 'common'. For the domestic tourist, travel hotspots are where you bump into the very people you are taking a break from: Pesky colleagues and neighbours. Trekking, snorkelling, even bird watching are victims of mass tourism and brochure promotions.

For the bored vacationer, the Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel offers refreshing departures. "Forget package holidays and classic routes", it says. Rewrite travel rules.

Experience. Relate. Look at travel through a lateral filter. There are alternative ways to be a tourist, Visit the world in creative, exciting and unusual ways. The trick is to "discover places that have no reason to exist".

Earlier, holiday-travel was for pleasure it was escape from reality today it is escape from comfort-induced boredom.

Disaster tourism or travelling to a scene of disaster — to tsunami-ravaged beach destinations like Phuket and the Andaman Islands; terrorist-targets like Egypt's Luxor and Sheik-al-Sharif, New York's Ground Zero and the Bali Islands and visits to battle-sites like Kargil — are being described more as voyeur's choice, a hindrance to relief and rehabilitation work. Promoters say it sensitises people to the plight of the affected and helps kick-start the local economy.

Surrealists and psycho-geographers, modern alternative thinkers, espouse a philosophy that seems to say: Let chance be your guide. A parallel is drawn between experimental travel and surrealist philosophy: 'It thrives on the tension between premeditation and spontaneity. The realisation that reason and anti-reason, sense and nonsense, design and chance, consciousness and unconsciousness, belong to each other as necessary parts of the whole'.

Experimental travel involves constant reinvention and creativity experiments include Blind Man's Bug, Slow-return and Ero-tourism. Ero-tourism is an experiment for couples, to arrive separately in an unknown foreign city and then find one another without having recourse to any means of communication, and without having decided on a meeting place. Blind Man's Buff, as the name suggests, is one partner blindfolding himself and 'seeing' and experiencing the journey and destination through the eyes of his companion. Slow-return travel means just that: Get to a destination via the fastest mode of travel and then chalk out your return through the slowest possible way

Anachronistic adventure entails travelling back in time by using, for instance, a Penny Farthing or hot-air balloon, navigating a town or village in period costume, to experience the pace and style of travel of a bygone age with greater authenticity Past-travel would include using an out-of-date guidebook to explore a city while noting the changes that have occurred over time. The Lonely Planet calls this comparative anachronistic tourism.

Counter-tourism — a critique of classical tourism — doing the opposite of what you think a traveller should do, like taking pictures with your back to key tourist sites, The results could be exciting and revelatory. Experimental travel is a playful way of travelling, where the journey's methodology is clear but the destination is unknown. Get adventurous. Hasn't it been said that it is the journey not the destination that matters? (Death of the Destination, TOI.B, 05.09.05, A00)

Year 2005 can perhaps aptly be described as the 'Year of the Traveller'. After all, when else has there been a time in the Indian travel industry when air travel was cheaper than rail, air-tickets were commonly sold for Rs 1 and you bought your rail ticket on the mobile phone en route to the railway station!

Much has changed on the travel landscape and then again so much remains to be done. While domestic aviation has clearly led the march, novel distribution ideas have made a dramatic impact on the landscape.

Electronic distribution via the Internet attained popularity in a relatively short time-span as customers embraced e-commerce for all the advantages it brought to their fingertips.

Power to the consumer (read traveller) was the dominant theme across most changes. Customers demanded more choice in all aspects — modes of travel, choice of carriers, hotels and destinations. And suppliers readily played ball in a desperate race for the ephemeral market leader status. The irony remained that supply rarely met demand and yet most airlines were prepared to bend over backwards to secure a lead in the ephemeral market share game.

Admittedly, the hospitality sector presented quite a different story. Demand outstripped supply at most times of the year and this resulted in hotels pricing their rooms at astronomical prices and actually getting away with it. Cities like Bangalore, Pune and Delhi went into a chronic 'sold-out' situation, fuelled largely by business travel that emanated from a booming corporate clime. It is a pitiful fact that the sum total of hotel rooms in India is less than that of the city of Las Vegas or as I recently learnt less than one sub-brand of the Marriott chain of hotels!

While we often tend to lump travel and tourism in one compartment, the truth is that while complementary, they are quite different in nature. India is galloping away to new heights in the travel category (air, hotel, taxis, etc., fuelled by a robust economy); much remains to be achieved on the tourism side. The only form booming is outbound tourism and as the name suggests, its benefits accrue to foreign countries that are clever enough to attract Indians to their modest but well-packaged attractions. Inbound tourism is actually growing at a mediocre rate. And it's due to the inherent infrastructural bottlenecks in the travel ecosystem. (Advantage traveller, Deep Kalra, FE.B, 25.12.05, A00)

The Acropolis in Athens made it, as did Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia, China's Great Wall, the Colosseum in Rome, the Inca temple of Machu Picchu in Peru, Stonehenge in England and the Moai — the Easter Island statues. Less immediately obvious choices in a final shortlist of 21 contenders for the New Seven Wonders of the World, announced in Switzerland, included the Kremlin in Moscow, the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty.

More than 19 million voters have so far taken part in what its organisers call the "world's first global voting campaign", nominating hundreds of sites they consider worthy rivals to the seven wonders of the ancient world named by Antipater of Sidon and Philon of Byzantium in 200 BC. (Global vote for new seven wonders, Jon Henley, BL.B, 03.01.06, A00)

A10 Tourism and Development

Giving a further boost to the aggressive 'Incredible India' campaign of India tourism, the prestigious UK magazine Conde Nast Traveller has rated the country 5th among the top 10 travel destinations in the world. "Conde Nast's recognition confirms India's growing stature as a fastest growing tourism destination," Minister of State for Tourism Renukha Chowdhury said. The rankings are an index of satisfaction with travel facilities and services, scored out of a maximum of 100. In the readers' travel awards questionnaire, readers were asked to choose the best that the travel world has to offer - everything from hotels and spas to airlines and airports. (India among top 10 tourist destinations, IE.C, 11.10.05, A10)

A80 Tourism Research / Education

Flustered by the growing poaching of its air crew including co-pilots and engineers by the competitors, Air Deccan, has decided to meet the problem head on by setting up an international standard school for training pilots, engineers and air crew. The world class institution would not only meet the captive requirements of Air Deccan but even provide training facilities to other airlines in India and abroad. The overall investment on the new project, scheduled to start soon, would be over around \$25 mn. (Air Deccan to start training school, TS.D, 13.05.05, A80)

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has signed an agreement with Ecole Hotelier de Lausanne (EHL) of Switzerland for consultancy and its academic affiliation for the new FHRAI Institute of Hospitality Management being established in Greater Noida. The institute will begin operation from August 05. The federation's Vice-President, Mr S.K. Khullar, said that this was first time in the country that a management institute of international standards for the hospitality industry was being set up by the apex body, which has about 2,700 members in 300 cities. (Hotels federation in pact with Swiss co to set up institute, Badal Sanyal, BL.B, 20.05.05, A80)

The travel industry is facing a manpower crisis with agencies not attracting the right kind of talent any more. The opportunity to travel and have a good social life, once the perks of the travel business, are no longer the preserve of those who work in this field.

Ms Shobana Lazarius, Managing Director, Sky Routes India Pvt Ltd, said that agencies are unable to attract talent mainly because of their inability to match the salaries paid by the business process outsourcing (BPO) companies.

In the smaller agencies, the entry-level salary for a fresh graduate in Chennai will be Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000, while salaries at the larger ones may go up to Rs 4,000 to Rs 6,000. A fresher with a similar qualification will get about Rs 10,000 in a BPO.

Untrained manpower is the biggest drawback for the industry. Travel companies do not want to spend on training their manpower and moreover, there is no such infrastructure available with them, said Mr Kanial Hingorani, Head & Vice President, Kuoni Academy of Travel.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council report, the demand for trained manpower in the travel industry is 10 lakh persons a year. Mr Kingarani said that only a fraction of this demand is met. There are a few institutes and colleges, which now offer travel and tourism courses.

Travel agencies are adding a call centre model to the traditional business model. The best part of it is that a young recruit can also look at running his own business after gaining the relevant experience in a travel agency, he said. (Travel agencies face shortage of manpower, Nina Varghese, BL.B, 06.09.05, A80)

The Kolkata-based International Group, which runs three hotel management institutes in India under the International Institute of Hotel Management banner, has firmed up plans to set up a hotel management institute in Dubai. The proposed institute, first of its kind in the Emirates, is set to become operational by April this year.

It will offer a three-year, full-time undergraduate degree course in International Hospitality Management. It will be located in Dubai's Knowledge Village.

The Dubai venture will entail an investment of Rs 20-25 crore that will be generated from internal accruals and other sources of finance. While the hospitality industry there generates a huge demand for trained professionals, the availability of those trained locally is scarce. (International Group plans hotel mgmt institute in Dubai, Ambar Singh Roy, BL.B, 09.01.06, A80)

■ B – TOURISM POLICY AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ■

B00 Tourism Policy and Plans

Giving a major push to the Atithi Devo Bhava campaign, Union Ministry of Tourism is convening a national meet of nodal officers from different Union Ministries and State Governments. "The basic idea is to assign definitive roles to all ministries, departments and State Governments and gear them up for the campaign." The Delhi meeting was aimed at achieving coordination between various Government departments that directly dealt with issues related to tourism. (Centre calls meet to rev up tourism drive, K V Kurmanath, BL.B, 12.5.05, B00)

To attract more tourists, the home ministry is considering two crucial proposals. First, is the visa on arrival scheme for tourists from 16 countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Norway and some Latin American countries. Second, the Ministry is considering easing the Restricted Area Permit and Protected Area Permit for foreigners going to the Northeast. This will help boost tourism in the region. (Govt. plans to repackage Destination India, Rajnish Sharma, HT.D, 31.05.05, B00)

A reunification of the ministries of culture and tourism is likely to come about when the Union Cabinet is reshuffled in July. Both the culture and tourism ministries have been in the eye of a storm ever since the formation of the UPA government last year. The Tourism Minister, Mrs Renuka Chaudhary, has been a little too outspoken, much to the discomfort of her seniors. A senior culture ministry official said there had been practical difficulties in executing projects as tourism and culture could not really be looked upon as separate entities. (Ministry melding likely for culture, tourism, Sanjay Singh, TS.D, 03.06.05, B00)

The Ministry of Tourism recently announced plans to restart the tourist guide exam after nine years. Last held in 1996, the exam will now be conducted on December 29, 2005.

Language experts had approached the court with a petition to hold the exam so that they too could qualify as tourist guides. The exam will be held every two years in a bid to streamline the need for professional guides in the country. Two training programmes will also start from August 29, a four month freshers course and a one-month refreshers course. These programmes will inculcate in the takers knowledge about Indian culture and prepare aspirants for the exam. The ministry also plans to have a special quota for wives of defence personnel. (Tourist guide exam to be started again after 9 years, Shveta Bhagat, TOI.D, 06.09.05, B00)

Among the new projects of the Union Ministry of Tourism include:

- ◆ Air India to display 'Incredible India' on tail of selected aircraft
- ◆ Tourism themes music to be made available at Microsoft Window
- ◆ Tourist taxis to run with 'Incredible India' graffiti
- ◆ Sight seeing package for underprivileged children from orphanages
- ◆ Exclusive website on rural destinations

(New initiatives launched on World Tourism Day, IE.C, 28.09.05, B00)

Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chowdhury said that the Ministry has earmarked Rs. 488 crore for tourism projects in various states for the current financial year without any pre-condition of matching grant.

At a meeting to review tourism projects in the states, she said that states have to ensure only timely completion of these projects and regular submission of reports to the Centre for future planning. Expressing concern over slow implementation in some of the cases, she said that the condition of matching grant from the state has been waived-off and now the states have to ensure only the availability of land for getting hundred percent financial supports from the Centre. She asked the states to actively consider redefining land use norms to facilitate construction of budget accommodation, rationalisation of various taxes in tourism industry and single-window clearance for tourism projects. The Minister suggested the states to adopt eco-

friendly practices at tourism destinations and to keep its role limited up to infrastructure developments. (Rs 488 cr to revamp tourism in states, IE.B, 28.10.05, B00)

Even as tour operators and agencies plead with the Central Government for easier visa regulations for tourists, the Tourism Ministry has recommended outsourcing visas to private companies, to loosen the stranglehold of the “visa bureaucracy” regime.

Ministry officials believe the only way to cash in on the growing India-boom worldwide is to make visas accessible to maximum people, in maximum cities, in maximum countries.

The outsourcing of visas help help reckon officials in two ways. “First, it is cheaper to outsource rather than set up 20 consulates to process visas. Two, it makes it safer and easier to process a visa through a private firm than risk the loss of passport through a travel agent.

The US has outsourced its visas through TI Services, a subsidiary of TTK Industries, which services requests from northern and southern regions. (Tourism Ministry pushes to outsource visas, Vrinda Gopinath, IE.D, 28.10.05, B00)

In an initiative aimed at giving a boost to the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism has approached the Planning Commission to mandate every Ministry to make tourism a sub-plan under which, at least 5-10% funds should be allocated towards tourism infrastructure development. The proposal was made by the Minister of Tourism Renuka Chowdhury.

The government in its Budget 2005-06 had allocated Rs 786 crore for tourism as against Rs 500 crore in 2004-05. It has also proposed Rs 415 crore for tourism infrastructure.

Talking about the other new initiatives taken by MOT, Ms Chowdhury said the ministry was also looking at the viability of signing MoUs with ‘smaller airlines’. (‘Make tourism a sub-plan in all ministries’, FE.C, 20.12.05, B00)

After long being at sea over cruise tourism’s huge potential — evident through its fast-growing global popularity — the government is finally formulating an elaborate policy to make India an attractive cruise tourism destination. This includes development of infrastructure and other facilities at various ports, in a bid to drift the flow of such foreign tourists into Indian shores.

A single cruise ship, usually having 10 decks, can easily accommodate 8,000-9,000 tourists, who need to book themselves for such package tours to visit pre-specified destinations.

While a high-power steering group has been constituted to formulate policy in the matter, a working group has identified Mumbai, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin ports on the west coast and Chennai, Tuticorin ports on the east coast for infrastructural development. Special theme circuits are being prepared by the Tourism Ministry keeping in view local cultural and geographical details.

Policy components:

- ◆ Immigration: Availability of proper visa. In the absence of proper visa, each port may have temporary landing permit for one month for cruise passengers and crew. Cruise travel agents are registered. Nomination and training of immigration officers at each port.
- ◆ Custom Clearance: Custom officers are already available at each port. They may ensure hassle free movement of passengers and goods.
- ◆ Quarantine Restrictions: The Ministry of Health may nominate an officer for each selected port to tackle quarantine issue related with yellow fever.
- ◆ Infrastructure: Necessary infrastructure like dedicated terminals, rest rooms, lounges, public conveniences, built up space for duty shops, restaurants, proper gangway for easy embarkation and disembarkation, baggage handling through conveyor belts, baggage storage cloak rooms to be created.
- ◆ Connectivity: Besides creating infrastructure for smooth and hassle free calling of cruise ships in Indian ports, connectivity through rail, road and air have been sought.

- ◆ Taxation Issues: A favourable taxation regime to be put in place in consultation with the RBI and CBDT under the finance ministry, besides consultation with state governments with regard to local taxes like service tax, luxury tax, octroi on supply of services, entertainment tax. (Centre to frame policy to attract tourists, Abhigyan Hans, AA.B, 15.01.06, B00)

The CAG has pulled up the Tourism Ministry for incurring irregular expenditure of over Rs.80 lakh on engagement of staff in India tourism offices abroad. Noting that engagement of staff was 'in disregard' of instructions, CAG, in its report tabled in Parliament said "the India tourism offices in London, Milan and Paris had been engaging contingency-paid staff from July 2001 to March 2005 for work of regular nature or against vacant posts and incurred irregular expenditure of Rs 83.17 lakh." CAG also described the response of the ministry as "not tenable". It said while Milan was appointing the temporary staff only during peak season to cope with heavy workload, the Paris office was finding it difficult to appoint a candidate to the post of secretary as the benefits offered were not attractive enough. (CAG pulls up tourism ministry for irregular expenditure, FE.B, 22.03.06, B00)

B20 Tourism Legislation

A National Tourism Advisory Council, chaired by the Minister of State for Tourism, has been constituted with members from ministries, experts in travel and tourism management and presidents of travel and trade associations. The secretary tourism would be the member secretary. (Tourism Council Constituted, TS.D, 04.05.05, B20)

The Maharashtra cabinet approved the controversial ordinance banning over 1,300 dance bars in the face of opposition from sections within the government as well as from outside. Titled the Bombay Police (Amendment) Ordinance 2005, it bans dance performances inside bars and eateries. It includes a stringent provision to provide for punishment upto three years and penalty upto Rs. 2 lakh for violations, and makes the offence non-bailable. Clubs, five-star hotels and tourism-related performances have been exempted from the ban. (Ordinance bans dance bars but keeps 5-stars out of it, IE.D, 19.05.05, B20)

B30 ITDC

In what is being seen by the Tourism Ministry as a vindication of their stand, liquor major UDV Diageo has offered additional 1,700 cases-20,400 bottles worth Rs 2.6 crore, free to ITDC for its 2004 supply. The company's most well-known product Black Label is the best-selling brand at ITDC's duty-free shops, accounting for nearly half the turnover.

This effectively means that the company has pushed down the purchase price of the best-selling brand and also has set a benchmark for future purchases and may now be in a position to compete with a new private player in New Delhi's duty-free business.

The rights and wrongs of how ITDC procures its liquor have been the subject of a war between bureaucrats and politicians for over six months. (Liquor giant's bounty for ITDC, TOI.D, 20.04.05, B30)

The Leela Group is acquiring the erstwhile ITDC five-star resort in Kovalam, its maiden operating hotel, for about Rs 120 crore from a Gulf-based non-resident businessman who currently runs it under the Meridien brand name. Another Rs 15-20 cr is likely to be invested in upgrading the 192-room property. The acquisition process, which is expected to be completed within the next 8-9 weeks, will expand the size of the Leela's in the south to four hotels by 2008. In the past, the chain has always built the hotel from a scratch. The Kovalam resort was acquired by the Muscat NRI during the ITDC disinvestment programme. A 5th hotel, a 65 all-suite boutique property in Udaipur, will be ready by October 2006. Leela's expansion plan includes land acquired in Chennai near the beachfront to build a 360-room luxury hotel complimented by commercial development for a tech park. To support its recent drive to aggressively expand its footprint, it is raising around Rs 350 crore (through a mix of options including foreign currency convertible bonds, ADR, equity). (Leela in Rs 120-cr deal for former ITDC resort; Also Plans Rs 15-20 Cr Upgradation of the Kovalam Property, Girish Rao, ET.B, 24.05.05, B30)

B32 Tourism Facilities

In a major directive which has far-reaching implications, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked various ministries to treat Indian and foreign nationals alike, doing away with the present “discriminatory” fees for various services and facilities, including hotel tariffs, domestic air fare and entry fee at historical monuments and other tourist sites.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked Cabinet Secretary B K Chaturvedi to review with the ministries concerned the discriminatory charges being levied for services to foreign passport holders, including NRIs. He has suggested that the ministries concerned should examine the feasibility of ending this anomaly and treating all consumers of such services equally irrespective of their nationalities. (‘Treat foreigners, Indians alike’, DH.B, 11.02.06, B32)

B40 Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements of Indian Government in Tourism

While moving towards a Regional Trade Arrangement (RTA), India and China entered into formal understanding to engage in a wide-ranging dialogue over the financial sector and to substantially liberalise civil aviation linkages that would result in a major increase in flight frequencies between the two countries. The civil aviation agreement seeks to increase the flight frequencies of designated airlines of each side to 14 per week on the IATA summer season of 2005 that would go up to 28 flights during the winter season and to 42 flights during the summer season of 2006. At present, each side operates seven flights a week. The two sides would also adopt ‘open skies’ policy for cargo with unlimited capacity entitlement for dedicated cargo services. Agreement has also been reached to simplify visa procedures for operating and cabin crew and employment of foreign pilots by the designated airlines of either side. The airlines would also be allowed to dry lease aircraft for both combination services and cargo sharing services. (India, China sign pact to relax aviation linkages; Joint group moots regional trade arrangement, BL.B, 12.04.05, B40)

India and Australia have agreed to jointly promote the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006 and in Delhi in 2010 to significantly increase the tourist flow. This was agreed at the first Joint Working Group meeting on tourism between the two countries.

Agreeing to adopt an action plan to have effective bilateral cooperation in various areas of tourism and travel, both the Ministers also agreed to establish a bilateral eco-tourism working group to identify joint research and training projects, an official release said. The Australian side agreed to host an Australia-India Tourism Business Forum to coincide with the Melbourne Commonwealth Games. (India, Australia to jointly promote Commonwealth Games, BL.B, 20.09.05, B40)

As a follow-up to the initiatives taken at the revived joint commission meeting here, India and Pakistan have formed a joint working group (JWG) to explore opportunities for promoting tourism between them. The JWG would workout modalities for promoting tourism in a big way between the two countries, Joint Secretary, Tourism Ministry Amitabh Kant, who accompanied External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh to his visit to Pakistan.

Mr Kant and other officials made video presentations to Pakistan’s group tour operators and tourism officials to impress upon them that through liberalisation of visa regime and promoting group tourism the two countries could tap a huge market involving over a million tourists.

In an effort to promote tourism, India has proposed to Pakistan to amend the existing agreement on visa to increase group tours to religious shrines and cultural exchange programme. The two sides agreed to pursue these proposals under the next round of composite dialogue process beginning in January. (India, Pak form JWG to explore ways to promote tourism, FE.C, 06.10.05, B40)

“There is tremendous potential for Indian investors in Mauritius, especially in tourism, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, BPOs, information technology and the energy sector and investors could make the best use of them to the benefit of both the countries,” said Mauritius Deputy Prime Minister Rama Sithanen. The Mauritius government offered to investors specially designed incentives, which could be in the form of lower corporate tax, exemption from custom duty on equipment and raw materials, preferential loan rates and

reduced tariff for power and water. Dividend was exempted from tax and free repatriation of profits, dividends and capital was allowed.

Mr. Rama Sithanen said his country's economy was no more based largely on sugarcane and tourism and had over the years shifted to other sectors like manufacturing, financial services, information technology, seafood industry, health, energy and BPOs.

The government wanted to convert the island into a duty-free port like Dubai, Hong Kong and Singapore and a place for hosting international conventions and conferences. It wanted to attract flagship hotel chains of international repute through a comprehensive hotel management scheme. Similarly it wanted to develop health tourism through health resorts coupled with golf courses. (Mauritius invites Indian investment; Plenty of scope in both manufacturing and services, says Deputy Prime Minister, TH.B, 30.10.05, B40)

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's appreciation of Indonesia's adoption of a visa-on-arrival policy for Indian nationals during the visit of President Susilo Bambang

Yudhoyono set the tone for a whole range of MoUs to be signed between the two countries. Both countries agreed to work together to improve connectivity and people-to-people contacts between their countries through enhanced tourism, civil aviation and shipping links. (Visa-on-arrival in Indonesia harbinger of closer cooperation, FE.B, 24.11.05, B40)

India and Mauritius are looking at whether the Indian rupee can be used by Indian tourists visiting the island, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications, Mr Charles Gaetan Xavier Luc Duval, said.

The proposal is one of the several measures that are being examined to facilitate travel of more Indians to Mauritius. There has been a steady increase in the number of Indians visiting Mauritius. During 2005, more than 29,000 Indians visited the country and the number of visitors from India is likely to cross 55,000 by next year, senior officials said. The two countries have also decided to further strengthen cooperation in the area of tourism and culture and have agreed to exchange expertise in the area of island tourism, human resource development and joint marketing of tourism destinations. (Tourists may be able to use rupee in Mauritius, BL.B, 15.02.06, B40)

India and France signed several agreements to boost trade and push nuclear energy co-operation between the two countries. India and France also signed an agreement on defence co-operation, to build and expand ties in various areas, including procurement, production and research and development of defence material. Seven other pacts in the field of space, commerce, education, tourism, environment, culture and civil aviation were also signed. (India, France sign pacts to boost trade, nuclear energy cooperation, BL.B, 21.02.06, B40)

Looking beyond oil, India and the six nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have decided to work together in new areas including information technology, manufacturing and tourism. After two days of deliberations during the second GCC-India business conference, both sides decided to forge an economic partnership that would focus on joint ventures driven by private initiative. In the Muscat Declaration, that was unveiled at the end of the conference, it was decided that information technology, biotechnology, tourism, industry, energy and petrochemicals would become the core areas of collaboration. (Muscat Declaration looks beyond oil, Atul Aneja, TH.B, 27.03.06, B40)

B61 International Tourism Legislation

India has urged Saarc countries to issue more business visas to partner countries and reciprocally provide each other transit facilities to third countries.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that these would not only link the Saarc nations, but more importantly, would connect the region to the ongoing economic miracle in South East and East Asia. Talking about the potential of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (Safta), which he said would hopefully be implemented on January 1 2006, the PM pointed out that the current level of intra-regional trade is expected to rise from \$6

billion to \$14 billion within two years of Safta's existence. Dr Singh said there was a need to expand the ambit of Safta to include trade in services in addition to widening the scope of trade in goods. (India as Saarc nations to issue more visas, FE.B, 18.11.05, B61)

B62 UN World Tourism Organisation - OMT (UNWTO)

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), an apex body of tourism, having been more than 200 countries as its member has unanimously elected India as the member of its Executive Council. In view of its emerging status in world tourism, India was elected in the Council to represent South Asia in the UNWTO meeting at Senegal, Ministry of Tourism said. Indian official representative at the conference, Amitabh Kant, has been elected member of core working group of the organisation to chalk out programmes and allot specific projects to a particular country for the promotion of tourism. In 2005, its membership is comprised of 145 countries, seven territories and more than 300 Affiliate Members representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities. (India elected executive member of UN world tourism organisation, 05.12.05, <http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=182040&cat=Business>, B62)

■ C – TOURISM ECONOMY, INDIAN ECONOMY ■

C00 Tourism Economy and Tourism Infrastructure

Should infrastructure be accorded priority sector status for credit delivery? The Reserve Bank of India Governor, Dr Y. V. Reddy, raised the question in the Annual (Monetary) Policy Statement presented on April 28. He said the issue was debatable for the following reasons:

- ◆ Enlarging the scope of priority sectors may result in loss of focus;
- ◆ Credit growth has been sluggish in agriculture and small-scale industries, but that in infrastructure has been strong;
- ◆ Only sectors that impact large population, weaker sections and are employment-intensive are eligible for priority status.

This stance of the central bank signalling tentativeness on financing infrastructure is surprising, given the critical role that the sector plays in the economy.

The Prime Minister, in his Independence Day address (2004) to the nation, identified Saat Sutras — seven priority sectors as “pillars of the development bridge — to ensure higher economic growth and more equitable social and economic development”. These are agriculture, water, education, healthcare, employment, urban renewal and infrastructure.

The Planning Commission has reiterated the need for world-class, cost-effective infrastructure in the context of a globalising economy. (Monetary Policy 2005-06 - Lending priority to infrastructure, Padmalatha Suresh, BL.B, 12.05.05, C00)

To give a big push to the tourism sector, the Government is formulating a new scheme that could see a quantum jump in the funds being made available for infrastructure development at tourism sites. The new scheme being drawn up by the Ministry of Tourism and Planning Commission proposes providing up to Rs 50 crore to every tourist project identified. The Ministry hopes to fund between 10-15 such projects annually.

The scheme will be in the form of 100 % central assistance. The states will set up a nodal body for disbursing the funds. The Ministry has already held one round of discussions with the Archaeological Survey of India to identify the sites that should be covered under the scheme. (Each tourism project to get Rs 50 cr for development, BL.C, 06.08.05, C00)

India plans to double its foreign exchange earnings from tourism in the next three years and make it the number one foreign exchange earner, tourism minister Renuka Chowdhury has said. “We earned \$4.8 billion in foreign exchange from tourism in 2004 and we expect it to cross \$10 billion in the next three years.”

The unprecedented growth and a successful campaign have resulted in the national geographical traveller calling India “the land of mystery and majesty,” she said. The Lonely Planet in a survey of 167 countries selected India as one of the top 5 destinations of the world. “It is also a matter of great pride for us that our efforts are getting international acknowledgement,” she said, adding India has won the 2005 PATA grand award in the heritage category for the ‘Ajanta Ellora conservation and tourism development project’ and the PATA Gold Award in the print media category for India’s incredible-Taj campaign. (India to double forex earnings from tourism, FE.B, 17.11.05, C00)

The Tourism Ministry said it favoured allowing 100 % FDI in developing tourist infrastructure in the country to give a major boost to the sector. ‘People and corporates must come forward and work for the development of tourism sector. When they share their views and opinions with the government and work towards a common goal, the sector would get a major boost,’ Renuka Chaudhary said. (Renuka for full FDI in tourism infrastructure, IE.B, 30.11.05, C00)

A recent Finance Ministry paper seeking Asian Development Bank (ADB) funds for tourism infrastructure projects has proposed aligning investment policy of the country tourism policy. It also mooted rationalisation of tax structure for the tourism industry at par with global benchmarks.

Highlighting the 'positive role' of FDI in the tourism development, the paper said FDI could result in an 'income-multiplying effect' in the sector. Concessions and incentives available to investors in other sectors must be extended to the tourism sector as well. The paper said tourism industry should be accorded national treatment. According to the paper, tourism activities must be included in the provisions of the bilateral investment treaties and double taxation avoidance agreements that India enters into.

On tourism infrastructure, the paper said government funds could flow to projects such as highways, airports, urban infrastructure and power. Private funds could be used for hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, dealers and handicraft stores. Public-private partnerships can occur in BOT projects for roads, airports, reports, heritages etc.

Every Rs 10 lakh investment in tourism creates 47.5 jobs directly and 89 jobs indirectly. Forex inflows from tourism surpass FDI inflows in recent years. (Finmin paper for rationalisation of tax structure in tourism industry, FE.B, 22.12.05, C00)

Tourism has emerged as a major source of employment in India, with a share of 8.27 % in total number of jobs in the country. According to the findings of a study commissioned by the Tourism department, for every 100 jobs created directly in the tourism sector in India, 80 indirect jobs are created. It said the total direct employment in the tourism sector for the year 2002-03 in the country was 21.54 million jobs and when indirect jobs were also added, the employment figure came to 38.6 million. Direct contribution of tourism to the GDP for the year 2002-03 was 2.78 per cent and when indirect effects were considered, the share of this sector contributes to the GDP goes up to 5.83 per cent.

Comparing the direct contribution of tourism to the GDP of major tourist receiving countries in the world, India's figure of 2.8 per cent is fairly well with developed nations like Canada (2.4 per cent), the US (2.2 per cent) and Japan (2.2 per cent) however, it is less when compared to countries like Spain (11.2 per cent), Australia (4.5 per cent), Switzerland (3.4 per cent) and Sweden (3.2 per cent).

The study was conducted under the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), a new framework recently adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission that provide an important platform for better understanding of the role of tourism in the economy. (Tourism a major source of jobs in India: Study, Uni Shankar, 01.03.06, <http://news.webindia123.com/news/showdetails.asp?id=265151&cat=India>, C00)

Already on a high, the travel and tourism industry got a fillip with the Finance Minister announcing several sops including increase in tourism budget from Rs 786 crore to Rs 830 crore; development of 15 new locations and reduction in fringe benefit tax (FBT) on tour and travel and hotels from 20 to 5%.

International air travel will also become expensive as the government decided to bring upper class international air travel under the net of service tax though economy class travel has been exempted.

At the same time, however, the Budget disappointed the sector by not granting the industry the much demanded infrastructure status. Also, increase in service tax from 10 to 12% came as a big let down particularly when the industry had sought 90% abatement on service tax imposed on it since last year.

The Budget proposal also includes travel on cruise ships in the ambit of service tax. It has also not offered any incentives or special sops to set up new hotel projects at a time when there's acute shortage of hotel rooms and tariffs are skyrocketing.

Besides taking up 15 tourist destinations and circuits for development, the government will also identify 50 villages with core competency in handicrafts, handlooms, and culture, close to existing destinations and circuits, and develop them for enhancing tourists' experience. The government also proposes to establish four new institutes of hotel management in Chattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal. (A mixed bag for travel and tourism, FE.D, 01.03.06, C00)

The domestic segment is raking in 71.1% of the moolah in tourism, ending up encouraging the growth of sectors which would otherwise face threat of extinction.

A maze of sectors — hotels, transport, food and beverage, have virtually become tourism-specific industries, thriving on domestic and outbound tourists alike. The hotel industry essentially depends on tourism. It accounts for 91.7% of total revenue. The generated by 'accommodation services'. As much as 18.4% of 'food and beverage serving services' flows out of tourism.

The transport sector, too, is celebrating big on men and women moving within Indian boundaries and flying in from abroad. Air travel has 93.8% money coming from tourism, while its contribution to Railway revenue is 294%. The money raked in by 'buses' because of tourists is 62.6%. The charm of small places and the oriental attraction — rickshaw rides is built on tourist movement. As much as 89.8% money generated by 'non-mechanised road transport' comes from tourism.

Entertainment business is drawing 49% of its revenue from tourism. All these figures have emerged from a study done by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) on the turnover-trends of tourism in 2002-03.

The first-of-its-kind study, commissioned by Ministry of Tourism, surveyed eight lakh domestic households and used other studies to bring out the startling figures.

The tourism turnover in 2002-03 was estimated at Rs. 62,436 crore. Of this figure, the domestic segment contributed Rs 44,403 crore while foreigners totalled for Rs 11,683 crore or 18.7%. (Home truths: Desi holidayers key to tourism survival, Subodh Ghildiyal, TOI.D, 04.03.06, C00)

The Economic Survey reports earnings from tourism, once critical to the BOP and still growing at 25 %, before touching on software exports, which were admittedly near zero till just the other day. We did earn \$5 billion from the 3.6 million tourists who visited India last year. But software exports, which grew 35 %, brought in four times as much.

— (in Rs crore)

| Tourism | 1980/1 | 1990/1 | 2000/1 | 2003/4 | 2004/5 |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Foreign travel receipts | 964 | 2,613 | 16,064 | 23,054 | 29,105 |
| Foreign travel payments | 90 | 703 | 12,741 | 16,534 | 24,744 |

Besides, the bird's eye view provided in the Survey by the Ministry of Tourism only gives data on tourists coming in; leaving it to the RBI to furnish a table, quietly relegated to the appendices, about tourists who are on their way out. (Tourism: on its way out? Sudhanshu Ranade, BL.B, 10.03.06, C00)

C02 Foreign Investment in Tourism Sector

Ancient monuments and historical objects of India have caught the attention of world community and many foreign countries have proposed contributing to their conservation.

Union Culture Minister S Jaipal Reddy informed the Lok Sabha that the government had received proposals from Japan, Italy and Belgium and World Monument Fund for Conservation for the maintenance of historical monuments. The government is also planning to launch a national mission to provide a comprehensive listing of built heritage, monuments, sites and antiquities. Mr Reddy added that Japan was providing financial assistance through UNESCO for the conservation of Buddhist sites at Sanchi and Satdhara in Madhya Pradesh while a MoU has been signed with Italy for the conservation of paintings at Ajanta and Ellora. (Foreign countries propose to conserve Indian monuments, TS.D, 22.04.05, C02 / D20d)

New York hotelier Sant Singh Chatwal, founder-president of the \$750 million Manhattan-based Hampshire Hotels and Resorts, is setting up a series of high-end boutique hotels in India. The hotels, first in Mumbai, will be opened under the brand "Dream".

"We are negotiating to acquire land and necessary permissions for the project in Mumbai. Similar super-luxury hotels will be opened in Bangalore, Jaipur and Delhi," Sant Singh Chatwal said. (Chatwal's boutique hotels to open soon in India, Arvind Padmanabhan, AA.D, 24.05.05, C02)

Aitken Spence & Co, Sri Lanka's biggest hotel operator, said it is looking to expand its operations to India, taking advantage of rising business and leisure travel to the country.

Aitken Spence, which runs 10 hotels in the island-nation, three resorts in the Maldives and owns Sri Lanka's biggest travel agency, is looking to expand after the December 26 tsunami damaged its beachfront properties. (Lanka hotel major to foray into India, BL.B, 24.05.05, C02)

Even as the government has decided to launch medical visas for foreigners visiting India for healthcare services, World Healthcare Network an US-based facilitator has stepped in to tap the Indian market. With the aim of bringing patients from the US to India for comprehensive medical services combined with a bit of tourism, of course — the American organisation has tied up with STIC Care, a new initiative of STIC Travel group. The move assumes significance since the medical tourism segment is witnessing brisk growth. Nearly 1,180,000 patients from various parts of the world arrived in India for treatment in 2004. (US firm to tap health tourism in India, ET.C, 31.07.05, C02)

Turner International India Pvt Ltd, the company in charge of sales and marketing of entertainment channels Cartoon Network and Pogo in the country announced that it would soon launch two theme parks. Designed around its kids' channels - Cartoon Network and Pogo - the parks would require an investment of around Rs 550 crore.

To be called Planet Pogo and Cartoon Network Townsville, the parks will be situated in Delhi-NCR, in Rohini and Noida respectively. Both the theme parks will have 100 % imported theme rides and will satisfy global safety standards. (Turner International to launch two theme parks, BL.B, 22.02.06, C02 / D20a)

C03 Tourism Finance

State Bank of Travancore (SBT) has launched a 'tourism special' loan scheme for the benefit of hotels, tour operators, pilgrimage conductors, and eco-tourism operators.

The loan is available for construction and modernisation of yatri nivas, hotels, motels, and cottages, and to travel agents for setting up offices and purchase of computers and equipment, according to a bank release. The loan can also be utilised for purchase of vehicles and houseboats by tour operators and for those who intend to set up restaurants, ice-cream parlours, amusement parks, health clubs and massage parlours in tourism zones. (SBT 'tourism special' loan scheme, BL.C, 21.04.05, C03)

Tourist inflows to India have registered a 15% growth in arrivals —forex earnings from tourism have already crossed the \$4-billion mark — in the first nine months of 2005. About 2.64 million, foreign tourists have visited the country in January-September, raking in over Rs 18,000 crore in foreign exchange.

The figure stands tall as against the 2.29 million visitors during the corresponding period last year, a growth of 15.2%. This also marks 20.6% jump in foreign exchange earnings in rupee terms, at Rs 18,379 crore, compared to Rs 15,243 crore earned last year in the same period, as per latest estimates by Ministry of Tourism. In dollar terms, earnings crossed the \$4.1 billion mark in the first nine months, as against \$3.4 billion registered last year during the same period. (Tourists bring forex, arrivals increase 15%, earnings cross the \$4-bn mark, Sudipto Dey, ET.C, 08.10.05, C03)

Travel insurance is growing in terms of volume though insurance companies say their profits are under pressure due to severe competition.

Leading insurers say the business has been growing at an average rate of 25 % per annum, though they do not have any actual figures to back it up.

Mr Sudhir Menon, National Sales Manager of ICICI Lombard, attributed the 25% growth mainly to the increasing number of people travelling abroad and the fact that they realise the need for travel insurance, especially in the light of natural disasters such as tsunamis and floods.

In fact, ICICI Lombard has witnessed a growth of 70% in travel insurance in the half-year period over the same period last fiscal.

However, the premium has dropped significantly in some sectors. For instance, the travel cover that used to cost Rs 700 for a six-day trip to Europe a few years ago, now costs only Rs 400. The premium for the US, Europe and South-East Asia, excluding Japan, now has different rates.

But travel insurance to the US now attracts higher premium than countries in Asia as compared to a few years ago when there was a flat rate for a fixed time period.

With business travellers constituting the bulk of the annual seven million outbound travellers from the country, insurance companies are increasingly looking at corporate travel insurance. "Corporate travel insurance is a phenomenon that has occurred post privatisation of the industry. We have clients such as Infosys, Wipro, Oracle and i-Flex for whom we develop customised travel insurance," (Travel insurance going places, Radhika Menon, BL.C, 19.12.05, C03)

A 10-year tax holiday for new hotel projects, single-window clearances, infrastructure development and of taxes are among the budget expectations of the hotel industry which has been on the growth path for the past two years. The industry also is seeking permission to set up real estate investment trusts (REITs). Mr R. Venkatachalam, Chief Financial Officer, The Leela Group, said a tax holiday would encourage more players to set up hotels, to bridge the shortage of rooms which according to government estimates stood at one lakh rooms. With a view to getting this benefit, the Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India (FHRAI), has in its pre-budget memorandum to the Government, sought infrastructure status for the hotel industry under Section 80I of the IT Act. (10-year tax holiday sought for new hotel projects, BL.B, 17.02.06, C03)

C11 Liberalisation Policies

The Lok Sabha passed the Special Economic Zones Bill, 2005 after adopting an official amendment to drop the Bill's provision in granting flexibility in labour laws by the States in the proposed Central Act. The original Act in any case had no direct Central role in laying down labour policy in the SEZs. The Left parties had been demanding scrapping of the Clause 50 of the Bill. The Central legislation proposed that the States may take suitable steps to grant exemption from labour laws applicable in the special economic zones. Hence, the Government moved an amendment to the SEZ Act, 2005 by dropping this clause. Now with the apprehensions voiced by the Left parties that the clause would be misused by States willing to attract foreign investment, the Government assuaged their apprehensions by moving an amendment to drop this clause. (Lok Sabha passes SEZ Bill, BL.B, 11.05.05, C11)

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry called for flexible labour laws in special economic zones (SEZs) and export units as part of a three-phase strategy for time-bound implementation of reforms. Under the phase-I of FICCI proposal, it was suggested that a self-certification system by corporates should be introduced for environmental clearances and electronic filing of records be allowed. It was also suggested that a common format be developed for computerisation of details and issuance of clearances for new investment proposals. As per the phase-II of FICCI's proposal, which could be implemented within 12-18 months period, contract labour should be allowed in small and medium enterprises. Further, value-added tax (VAT) rates should be harmonised, withdrawing all state and local levies like a CST, entry tax, Octroi etc. Under the phase-III, FICCI suggested the implementation of contract labour in all industries and this phase targeted reforms where larger political consensus was required. (FICCI for flexible labour laws in exporting units, VT.B, 30.08.05, C11)

C20 Transport

With the government accepting in principle a proposal to allow global luxury taxi companies to operate in Delhi, this could well be the scene in city cabs. Hertz and Super Cab, two international taxi companies, have asked the government to allow operations in Delhi. However, both the companies won't plunge head-on. According to the proposal, Hertz will initially start with 100 taxis. If the concept works, they may increase the fleet to 750. Super Cab will start with 50 taxis and may go up to 500. Delhi hasn't had much success with another experiment in cabs - radio taxis. There are only about 200 radio taxis in Delhi, of which 135 are owned by one company and about 60 by another. (MNCs step in with luxury cabs, Chetan Chauhan, HT.D, 18.05.05, C20)

C21 Road Transport

Enthused by the success of public-private partnership (PPP) model in the development of highways, the government is planning to develop an additional 30,000 km of highways under NHDP III at a cost of about Rs 1,72,000 crore during the next seven years.

Under this scheme, it is proposed to cover an additional 30,000 km besides four-laning of 10,000 km under NHDP III. The committee of Infrastructure headed by the Prime Minister was considering six-laning of 5,000 km of national highways and construction of 1,000 km of expressways under NHDP V and NHDP VI respectively. A length of 6,000 km has already been developed to four-lane standards in the earlier phases. PPP would be the major plank of the highways development programme in which private enterprises would invest money for developing these highways and would get returns through fees collected from the users. Developing highways through PPP entailed certain benefits like generating awareness among the users to pay for the benefits ensured to them. (Govt plans to develop 30,000km of highways: Baalu, VT.B, 22.07.05, C21)

A super Himalayan Highway connecting all the tourist destinations in Uttaranchal and linking the State with Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh is reportedly on the anvil.

The proposed 660-km long Himalayan Highway will span two far flung outposts in the State. It will start from Tiyuni in the outer reaches of Garhwal in the Dehra Dun district, abutting the neighbouring state of Himachal and stretch across all the major tourist destinations in Garhwal and provide connectivity into Kumaon right up to Lohaghat. Here it will connect the State to the foothills of Uttar Pradesh.

Additional Chief Secretary M Ramachandran said the idea had been derived from the Asian Highway concept which proposed to link India with Bangladesh and Pakistan. He said there was a proposal to eventually link all the Himalayan states via a trans-Himalayan Highway that would stretch from Jammu and Kashmir to the North east.

In the context of the Himalayan Highway in the state, a detailed Project report has already been sent to the Central government. A feasibility report has already been commissioned by the Central Ministry of Surface Transport for a sum of around Rs 6 crore. The proposed Highway will start from Tiyuni and run across Deoban, Chakrata, Nagnath, Lakhwad, Musoorie in the Dehradun district and cut across Dhanolti, Chamba and Maletha in Tehri district before reaching Sri Nagar (Pauri district), Rudraprayag (Rudraprayag district) and then going on into the Chamoli district via Karnprayag and Garsain. From Garsain the proposed highway will run into Kumaon via Dwarahat and Almora, all the way to Lohaghat in the Pithoragarh district. (Himalayan Highway to connect tourist hot spots, Namita Kala, T.P.D, 03.09.05, C21)

The government has finally approved the construction of an alternative route to Leh, via Manali. Six years after the traditional Srinagar, Leh route IA was hit by Pakistani shelling during the Kargil conflict, the Centre sanctioned Rs 943.32 crore for the project, to be completed in nine years. "The all-weather 292 km route via Darchu, Padam and Nimu will be constructed at a total cost of Rs 1,355 crore, including an 8.8 km long tunnel under the Rohtang Pass," Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said. (Centre paves way for new Leh route, via Manali, IE.D, 07.09.05, C21)

C22 Water Transport

Only 40,000 tourists from India opt for cruise holidays every year as against over 10 million globally, according to industry estimates. But, considering the 5-million outbound tourists from India, there's room for growth in the cruise liner segment. With international airfare from India getting slashed, cruise tourism is likely to gain in popularity. Besides, international cruise liners are looking at India too - Star Cruise, for instance, is planning a service in the country. Also, the first Indian liner, Ocean Cruises India, is set to begin operation between Goa and Lakshwadeep by the end of this year.

Although it's the economical 'Star Cruise' that's much more attractive than the high-end luxury liners for tourists from India, the total numbers have already grown. From 8,000-10,000 Indian tourists taking holiday cruises five years ago, the numbers have gone up to 40,000 now, according to Mr Chaddha. Maximum number of Indian tourists opts for cruise in the South-East Asia region. On the Far-East and South-East-Asia routes, a two-night cruise comes for around \$300. Longer cruises cater to the high-end market, and are not typically meant for tourists from India, argues Prime Travel Managing Director Arun Verma. (Short leisure cruises are catching on with Indians, Nivedita Mookerji, TPD, 19.05.05, C22)

Cruising the riverways is now catching on with the new age tourist who wants to do things which are slightly different. The trend started with Kerala, with its backwaters tourism. However, other states have quickly introduced different versions of their own. Goa's cruises on the Mandovi and other rivers are very popular while the Brahmaputra river cruise is a favourite with eco-tourists since it offers a spectacular view of the Kaziranga.

And with demand also comes supply. The latest to join the bandwagon is Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) which has introduced overnight cruises on Godavari, with a single boat. In other cities, variations are being tried out. In Mumbai a floating restaurant docks out at sea while a similar restaurant floats on the river Hooghly in Kolkata. In Karnataka, Jungle lodges and Resorts (JLR) has started cruises off the Karwar coast, though overnight stays are still some way off.

According to the industry river cruises is a fast growing segment. Though it is an insignificant number in other states, in Kerala, over 1 lakh tourists patronised backwaters tourism last year. (They love to go up and down the river, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 01.07.05, C22)

In a major boost to cruise shipping in the country, the Union Government allowed operation of cruise services by a Malaysian cruise liner on two sectors - Mumbai to Lakshadweep (Kadmat island) and Mumbai to Goa, expected to start operations by October this year. The Shipping, Road Transport and Highways Ministry conveyed its 'no objection' for cruise operation, setting into motion the launch of the service. Out of a total of nine subgroups constituted by the steering group to make specific recommendations, four sub-groups have submitted their reports on identification of ports, immigration issues, taxation issues and issues pertaining to customs clearances for suitable incorporation in the draft cruise shipping policy of the country. (Govt nod for cruise services in 2 sectors, IE.C, 05.08.05, C22)

A comprehensive national maritime development programme envisaging a public private investment of over Rs 100,000 crore is on the anvil. Of this Rs 61,000 crore will be invested in the port sector. Investments in the shipping and inland water transport is expected to be Rs 40,000 crore. All these investments, proposed to be made in the next 10 years, would be part of the National Maritime Policy to be presented before the Union Cabinet shortly for approval, the Union Minister for Shipping and Road Transport, Mr T R Baalu said. "The policy envisages a comprehensive strategy for the country's maritime sector including ports, shipping, inland waterways and ship building. It has been finalised after its draft was discussed at the inter-ministerial coordination committee meetings.

In the port sector the projects planned are construction of berths (Rs 33,000 crore), deepening of approach channels (25 projects - Rs 8310 crore), Port equipment (32 projects - Rs 1700 crore), rail and road connectivity to ports (36 projects. Rs 12,950 crore) and development of special economic zones (47 projects - Rs 5100 crore). (Rs 100,000 cr investment in maritime sector on cards, FE.B, 22.08.05, C22)

Travellers weary of Kolkata's congested roads now have a faster option for visiting places like Budge Budge to the south or the temple town of Belur in the north with the launch of a water taxi service by Vivada Inland Water Transport.

Beating the state's government to its plans of launching public transport on two canals in north and south Kolkata, Vivada has taken on the river Hooghly with small motorboats that can carry 10 passengers.

A crude oil transportation company, Vivada has joined hands with the West Bengal Surface Transport Corp (WBSTC) to launch two water taxis in the first phase of a Rs 12.5 crore project. It expects to have ten of these 'on call' taxis running by the end of this year.

By January 2006, Vivada will also start a five-star floating hotel linking Kolkata with the Sunderbans mangrove forest region. It expects the five-star vessel with 34 double cabins to be a cash cow that will keep the water taxi service afloat till it gains momentum. It will also offer the water taxis for tourism or fun cruises. (Kolkata gets water taxis canal transport by Jan, FE.D, 04.10.05, C22/S10)

The government may open up the cruise shipping sector for foreign direct investment, as part of its efforts to promote tourism. It may also amend the Merchant Shipping Act to simplify registration procedures for foreign cruise companies.

An exclusive policy for cruise tourism is being evolved, which is likely to prepare details of the FDI regime and spell out measures to upgrade ports and other related infrastructure. A high-power steering group under the chairmanship of the Minister of Shipping and the Minister of State for Tourism as its co-chairman had already been set up to finalise a cruise policy. The shipping ministry has already relaxed cabotage to allow foreign flag cruise vessels to coastal areas without hassle in the absence of Indian flag vessels in this segment.

The government is also contemplating to develop seven ports as cruise shipping stations. These are Cochin in Kerala, New Mangalore in Karnataka, Marmugao in Goa, Mumbai in Maharashtra, Kolkata in West Bengal, Port Blair in the Andaman & Nicobar Island Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, the statement has said.

Besides this, small berthing places will also be developed at various sites for small vessels. Special tourism circuits for each port would also be prepared keeping in view the local cultural heritage, it said.

Similarly, New Mangalore could be linked with the tourism circuit of Bangalore, Belur, Halebid and Hampi. (Govt may open up cruise shipping for FDI to boost tourism, FE.C, 13.10.05, C22)

India and the Bahamas have decided to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for exploring the possibilities of cooperation in the area of cruise shipping.

This was decided at a meeting between Bahamas Minister of Foreign Affairs and Public Service Frederick Mitchell and Shipping, Road Transport and Highways Minister TR Baalu.

Bahamas is a favoured cruise shipping destination in the world and its expertise could be used as valuable sign-post in the development of the Indian cruise shipping industry. (India to join Bahamas, explore cruise shipping, FE.B, 24.01.06, C22)

C23 Railways

The Indian Railways could finally be opening its doors for increased private participation.

The Prime Minister's Committee on Infrastructure has asked the Ministry of Railways to submit a policy paper on public-private partnership (PPP) in various areas, including running goods trains between specific points such as coal mines and power stations and running passenger trains between tourist destinations.

PPP in running passenger trains between tourist destinations could be a further extension of Railways' Palace on Wheels service that cater to premium tourist segment, which are run in partnership with the

respective State tourism departments. (Rly Ministry to submit policy paper to Cabinet by Sept, Public-private partnership, Mamuni Das, BL.B, 19.05.05, C23)

500 workers are completing the Lhasa River Bridge, part of a 1,142-km project that will link Tibet by rail to the outside world for the first time. Foreign observers have long criticised the rail project, begun in 2001, for favouring members of China's Han majority over Tibetans. But they also fear that once the railroad has connected Tibet with neighbouring Qinghai province in two years' time, it will continue to benefit the Han Chinese first and local Tibetans last.

Officials in Lhasa, by contrast, emphasise the advantages they say the rail line will bring to the Tibetans, such as greatly reduced transportation costs for Tibetan products.

But what worries pro-Tibet advocates overseas is that when the rail link is completed, a train ride from Beijing to Lhasa will take just 48 hours, and Tibet will suddenly be within much easier reach for millions of job hunters.

The Tibetans, who are already under pressure from massive Han immigration, could end up becoming even more marginalised, said Kate Saunders, the Washington-based spokeswoman for the International Campaign for Tibet. Local officials acknowledge that the rail will make it easier for Han Chinese to go to Tibet, but deny that Tibetans have so far lost jobs to migrant workers. (A rail link to 'Roof of the World', BL.C, 07.08.05, C23)

In an attempt to counter dipping air fares, the Railways have decided to go SOFT—Scheme of Frequent Travellers. Rail passengers can soon earn points for frequent travel, which they can use to avail a free ticket or concession of the same amount. Rail travel during lean periods will get passengers points equivalent to 10% of the ticket cost—4% during peak season. The scheme will be handled by the IRCTC, which is ready with the software. The scheme will be in place by next month. The Railways had earlier introduced an automatic upgradation scheme to ensure that coaches—especially AC I and II—do not remain empty. As per this scheme, if there is heavy rush in the Sleeper category, wait-listed passengers can be upgraded to AC III, II or even I. (Rlys to go SOFT on frequent travel, Bhavnavij Aurora IE.D, 03.10.05, C23)

The Railways has identified five possible routes to Bhutan. Rail India Technical and Economic Services, entrusted with conducting a feasibility study of the routes, is expected to submit a report by October. While two of the routes link north Bengal with Bhutan, the rest originate from Assam. The locations have been proposed considering their proximity to the National Highway and the road connectivity between the towns on either side of the border. (Rail routes to Bhutan identified, TH.B, 06.01.06, C23)

The Indian Railways are now giving final touches to a proposal to set up a rail link with Burma crossing through the north-eastern states to boost bilateral trade and people-to-people contact between the two countries. The Ministry of External Affairs was in touch with its counterparts in Burma to facilitate this project. This initiative has been taken in the light of the resolutions of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Technical and Multi-Sectoral Initiative (BIMSTEC). The Railways have already started work to construct a 60 km long track connecting Jiribam, hitherto the last rail-head in the east, to Toupel in Manipur. (Train to Burma via N-E soon, Manoj Anand, AA.B, 08.01.06, C23)

The Union Minister of State for Railways, Mr R. Velu, said as many as 290 projects were pending with the Railway Board and Rs 47,000 crore was required for taking up these projects. He said these projects had already been sanctioned after conducting necessary surveys, but could not be taken up due to want of funds. To a question, Mr Velu said the required funds would be raised through Budget support, internal borrowing, assistance from World Bank and Asian Development Bank, by creating a 'Special Purpose Vehicle' (SPV) in which stake-holders, state governments and private sector would be involved. It was proposed to take up all pending projects in backward areas through SPV. ('290 Railway projects pending due lack of funds', BL.B, 08.02.06, C23)

The much-talked about budget hotel concept of the Railways may finally take off with the Ministry reworking terms of build, operate, transfer (BOT) arrangement that could result in easier revenue share regime for hoteliers.

The terms being reworked include provision of a “letter of comfort” from the Railways for the land on which the hotel would be built and a likely increase in the period for which companies would be allowed to operate the hotel. There would be a revenue sharing arrangement between Railways, Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and the hotel operator, which would be decided through a bidding process.

Letter of comfort: One of the reasons why the project wasn’t taking off was while IRCTC was the executing body, the land was being provided by the Indian Railways and the interested parties wanted a guarantee from the land provider to ensure that the terms of land use do not change midway.

Tariff fixing: The operator would be free to fix tariffs though some accommodation should be reserved for economy segments. Earlier proposal made it mandatory for operators to provide 50% of rooms for below Rs 1,000 per day. This condition, which companies found stringent, may be relaxed to some extent.

Sites identified: Meanwhile, the Railways has identified 34 sites to set up budget hotels. The bids for these sites would be invited and there would be a two-tier tender.

Players with prior experience in hospitality would be chosen, after technical qualifications. Financial bids would then be invited from these players. (Railways’ budget hotel concept on track, Mamuni Das, B.L.B., 13.02.06, C23)

With low-cost airlines eating into its premium category, the railways has finally announced steep cuts in its first AC and second AC fares for the first time in many years. The sleeper class has, however, been spared from any hike. The fare of 200 mail-express trains that would now run as super fast trains may, however, go up marginally as it would attract additional ‘superfast levy.’ Presenting the Rail Budget in Parliament, Railway Minister Lalu Prasad pared AC first class fares by 18% and cut the fares for AC second by 10%. (Lalu cuts AC fares to check onslaught by airlines, F.E.D., 25.02.06, C23)

A 13-member delegation of citizens from Pakistan who came to India by the rail link via the Munabao-Khokhrapar route revived recently called for easing the restrictions on travel between the two countries and evolving a lenient visa regime to make the historic “unlocking” of the western border a success. The delegation, comprising trade union activists, labour leaders, social workers and peace activists, travelled by the Thar Express. The group interacted with a cross-section of society to find that the people in Rajasthan are jubilant about the train from Pakistan restarted after four long decades.

The leader of the delegation, Abdul Lateef Mughal, pointed out that the “reluctant” governments of India and Pakistan had been compelled to restore the rail link by the popular demand of people at large. (Call to ease restrictions on travel between India, Pakistan, T.H.D., 01.03.06, C23)

C23a Luxury Trains

In a bid to foster stronger relationship, the southern states are working together through the tourism sector to position South India as one large block to attract both domestic and international tourists. As a step towards this, the first luxury train chugging across the southern states is likely to be introduced in the next 18 months. Announcing this at the South India Tourism Ministers’ conference held in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy said that a feasibility report has been prepared for the Rs 40-crore Southern Splendour South India tourism train by the state tourism department. The report has received an in-principle approval from the Union government and a special purpose vehicle will soon be registered. Andhra Pradesh government said besides a committee will also be formed involving other state governments to look into the social and other security issues for the benefit of tourists. (Luxury train for South likely, F.E.B., 29.04.05, C23a)

Setting aside strong protests, the Vasundhara Raje Government has decided to privatise the country’s premium tourist train, Palace on Wheels.

While the opposition Congress and the employees of the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) — the Government agency which runs the train — are opposing the decision, the Government has decided to hand over the train to a five-star chain before the start of the tourist season in September.

The Government invited applications from leading five-star chains for the maintenance and management of the train. The hoteliers have been given a fortnight to make their presentations, following which the Government would select the successful bidder.

Although many agree that the train, considered among the top 10 luxury trains in the world, would benefit from privatisation, the haste with which the Government has decided to go ahead with the process has drawn flak. (Palace on Wheels open to private players, IE.C, 28.07.05, C23a)

The Palace on Wheels is making news even before it begins its first Journey of the new season on September 7. Reason: the ongoing controversy over the outsourcing of services on board the luxury tourist train. A seemingly desperate Rajasthan government swung into action to open the financial bids for the contract for the outsourcing. The bids were opened in the presence of representatives of the Taj Group of Hotels - the only bidder. The Rajasthan HC asked the government to continue with the current management of the train and not get its activities outsourced. (Who'll get Palace on Wheels? Siddhartha Bose, HT.D, 03.09.05, C23a)

The Railways will introduce luxury tourist trains for foreign as well as domestic tourists. The Railways is planning to run steam engine-hauled toy trains on hill stations. It is also gearing up to woo tourists by introducing tourist cars which would be attached to the regular passenger trains. All these tourist packages will be done on the basis of public-private partnership (PPP). The tickets for these tourist packages can be made available through Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation's (IRCTC) website or through tour operators.

First on the anvil is the luxury segment train aimed at international tourists. For this, a second Palace on Wheels train has been given the principal approval by the government to the railways, which will entail a cost of Rs 24 crore. The train will be made operational by 2007. This second royal train will beckon you to step aboard for a week of splendour as it offers facilities like spa, gym, conference room, beauty saloon, fax and internet.

For domestic tourists, railways are introducing a luxury train on the lines of Palace on Wheels but with less frills and cost. Hotel Oberoi has approached railways to invest on this train.

Also in line is a proposal to introduce tourist cars in passenger trains which would be hired by a group of tourists wishing to travel to a particular location. These tourist cars would be attached to regular passenger trains to be hauled to destinations booked. Taj Group of Hotels is in talks with the railways for investing on these toy trains.

In a bid to focus more on tourism, the railways are planning to earmark some seats for the tourists in every segment of travel. Calling it a Value Added Tour Package (VAT), this will enable railways to fill up the vacant seats during the lean season and also to retain their market share. Special food could be part of the value added package. It is planning to keep around 15-20 seats in this category in every class. For these tourism packages, the railways is planning to rope in private travel agents like Thomas Cook and Sita Travels. (Railways plans luxury tourist trains, Corporates to chip in with funds and ideas on tapping tourism, Ema Vasudev, ET.B, 27.02.06, C23a)

C24 Civil Aviation Plans and Policies

The new agreement to be signed between India and the US will provide for unrestricted airline services between the countries and from there to third countries. There will also be no restriction on tariff, flight frequency or type of aircraft deployed. India and the US are expected to draw up a new, more liberal open skies agreement.

At present, approximately two million passengers travel a year between the two countries. The broad contours of the new agreement were finalised during the visit of Mr Patel (Civil Aviation Minister) to the US early 2005. The new agreement will replace the existing India-US aviation agreement, which was negotiated in 1956 and limits the number of airlines that can fly between the two countries, the cities they can serve, the frequency of their flights and their fares. (Indo-US open skies to allow third country flights, Sudhir Chowdhary, FE.B, 14.04.05, C24)

The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, proposed a South Asian open skies agreement that would remove restrictions on flights operated by State owned and private airlines from seven countries. India was ready to offer the open skies facility on a reciprocal basis. India, which now has such an arrangement only with Sri Lanka. (India offers S. Asia open skies pact, TH.B, 13.05.05, C24)

The Government has no immediate plans to review the foreign direct investment limit in the domestic aviation sector, the Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr Praful Patel. "The present 49 % cap on foreign direct investment in the aviation sector is sufficient. The Government recently hiked the cap in the domestic aviation sector to 49 % from the earlier level of 40 %. However, foreign airlines are not allowed to pick up a stake in domestic airlines. (No immediate plans to review FDI cap in civil aviation: Minister, BL.B, 25.05.05, C24)

Flights between India and Germany are set to more than double in a phased manner in the near future with the two countries agreeing to allow their designated carriers up to 50 flights a week either way. These airlines have also been allowed to fly onwards to a third country. Moreover, airlines from Germany have been allowed to operate to Kochi, Hyderabad and Goa, while specified airlines from India will be allowed to operate to three more cities in Germany. India is, however, yet to specify the three German cities to which its airlines would like to start flying. This was agreed to at the conclusion of bilateral air services talks between India and Germany. (India, Germany agree to increase air connectivity, BL.B, 26.05.05, C24)

In its spree to expand flights to and from India, the government has updated the bilateral agreements with Belgium and the Netherlands, allowing a total of 42 frequencies per week to and from the two countries. With the signing of air-services agreements with these countries, the total number of nations with whom such accords have been entered into by India this year has risen to 9. The other countries are France, UK, US, Qatar, Germany, China and Oman. Both Belgium and the Netherlands have agreed to allow multiple carrier designations, through which more than one Indian airline can operate to these two nations and vice-versa. (42 new flights to and from Belgium, Netherlands, FE.B, 28.05.05, C24)

The Central Government is not keen on allowing State Governments to float their own airlines for operations on international routes. The Centre's latest thinking could put a spoke in the proposed plans of the Kerala government to float an airline to operate flights to the Gulf region. The Central Government would not change the existing rules to allow Kerala or any other State Government to float an airline purely for operating international flights. The current rules allow only those airlines that have completed at least five years of domestic operations and have a fleet of 20 aircraft to operate international flights. The Kerala Government recently sent a proposal to the Centre seeking relaxation in rules and allow it to start an airline that could operate between the State and the Gulf region. The State has been keen to start the airline, as passengers travelling from there to the Gulf have been facing problems.

Central Government officials point out that acceding to the request of the Kerala Government at the moment will go against the decision of the Union Cabinet, which has barred even the two private sector airlines — Jet Airways and Air Sahara - from operating to the Gulf region for three years. This, the officials said, was a conscious decision of the Government to protect Air India and Indian Airlines.

To ensure that international air travellers do not face any problems, the Government has followed a liberal air services bilateral regime that has seen a huge increase in the air seats allotted to airlines of various countries including the Gulf region. (Centre not to allow States to float airlines for international routes, BL.B, 09.11.05, C24)

In its bid to step up efforts to attract more Indian tourists, a tour operator in Italy is mulling over a chartered flight from Punjab to cash in on the recent increase in visitors from India. This is part of the concerted effort made by both Government and private agencies to sustain the 20 % growth of tourist flow from India. The Italian State Tourist Board (ISTB) is also exploring the possibility of a tie-up with a leading Indian tour operator for tapping the potential of operating chartered flights to Italy. (Italy for strategic tie-ups to attract Indian tourists, BL.B, 24.11.05, C24)

Government is actively considering allowing 100 % foreign direct investment (FDI) in airports through the automatic route, doing away with the FIPB clearances. The Commerce Ministry has suggested a slew of FDI policy changes and the Group of Ministers headed by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar is evaluating the pros and cons before allowing 100 % foreign participation in the development of airports through the automatic

route. Currently 100 pc foreign participation in sector is allowed but there is a sectoral cap of 74 %. If the foreign company wants to invest more than 74 pc it has to apply to FIPB approval. The move would give a boost to the proposed up gradation and modernisation programme announced by the aviation ministry for 35 non-metro airports and the greenfield airports to be set up in consultation with the states. (100 pc FDI in airports through automatic route, VT.B, 11.01.06, C24)

The Indian aviation industry has been rapidly expanding in the last few years with the entry of several new airlines especially low-cost operators, the opening up of international routes for private domestic carriers, the introduction of open skies regimes: the substantial increase in-flight entitlements under bilateral agreements and initiation of private sector participation in the development and management of airports. However, as the industry moves away from the state-centric model where the government was the only significant player in the entire industry to the multi-player model of the post-liberalisation era where there is large scale participation from private players, there is an urgent need to establish an independent regulator who has the mandate to regulate technical and economical aspects in the sector.

At present, the Ministry of Civil Aviation is the apex civil aviation regulator institution in India. It is responsible for formulating and implementing the national aviation policy. Taking key decisions on all issues related to aviation, initiating major initiatives in aviation. Other regulatory bodies like the directorate - General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) are under its purview.

The need for a regulator authority to deal with the important economic issues in the sector is acutely, i.e. the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and substantial interest in major industry players like Indian Airlines, Air-India, Pawan Hans Corporation and the Airport Authority of India. There is a clear potential for conflict of interest in this case and therefore the regulatory functions of the ministry need to be transferred to an independent regulator.

Secondly, an independent regulator with integrated regulatory functions can address all technical, economic, management, operational, environmental, licensing, liability, safety and security-related issues in a holistic manner and create standards in line with global best practices. The current piecemeal approach where a regulator's mandate is restricted to just one aspect leads to an overall ineffective regulatory framework and several key issues are not properly addressed at all.

Independent 'super' regulators have been created for other sectors like telecom (the Trai) and insurance (the Irda), which also underwent a similar transition from a state-monopoly model. The Naresh Chandra Committee has recommended creation of a regulatory mechanism consisting of an independent regulatory authority with a mandate to deal only with economic functions while the DGCA would retain its technical regulatory functions. However, regulatory experience in the civil aviation sector from other countries indicate that divorcing economic and technical issues in modern aviation leads to several regulatory problems and hinder the growth of the sector. Therefore, the proposed civil aviation regulatory authority needs to cover both economic and technical issues so that it can effectively deal with the complexities of modern civil aviation in India. (For an independent aviation regulator, Sudip Mahapatra, ET.B, 23.01.06, C24)

The Delhi and Mumbai airport modernisation process was disrupted, once again, when the Airports Authority of India (AAI) employees did not allow the government to open financial bids.

The financial bids of pre-qualified bidders would not be opened and the Civil Aviation Ministry would hold discussions with the employees on the 'alternate plan' they have submitted on the matter.

This assurance was given to the agitating employees by the AAI management, following which the AM Employees Joint Forum suspended their agitation to protest the proposed privatisation move. (AAI workers suspend stir against privatisation, FE.B, 28.01.06, C24)

The Union Budget 2006-07 has provided some relief to the domestic aviation sector while international air travel and travel by cruise ships is set to become slightly more expensive. The Budget, however, has also proposed levying a 12 % cess on air passengers flying abroad in business or first class and on travel on cruise ships.

However, the Fringe Benefit Tax would be levied at 5 % instead of 20 % for airline companies and shipping industry to value the benefits in the form of 'hospitality' and 'use of hotel and lodging facilities. (Domestic airlines get tax exemption for 1 more year, BL.B, 01.03.06, C24)

The boom in air travel appears to have encouraged the Finance Minister to tap the sector for more revenues in the next fiscal. Mr P.Chidambaram has decided to tax the predominantly corporate and high net-worth individuals who patronise the upper deck (first and business class) of international flights from India with a service tax, and that too, an enhanced one (12% now).

In fact, aviation think tank CAPA country head Kapil-Kaul says there is not much in the budget to cheer the aviation sector. For an industry which is tipped to attract \$50 billion investment (aircraft acquisition, new airports in 10 years), there is little to show — on the part of the government — on how to make the industry more viable by addressing its cost structure. (High fliers face a downer, ET.B, 01.03.06, C24)

Asserting that passenger rights should be clearly defined, Air Passengers Association of India (APAI) said draft guidelines, on the lines of an Act in the European Union, was expected to be ready by April. APAI president D Sudhakara Reddy said such rights were vital because there were many instances when airlines services had been deficient and the passengers had not been compensated appropriately.

Citing one instance a passenger recently had confirmed booking from Bangkok to Chennai and when he reached the airport he was told that the flight had left two-hours in advance as it had been rescheduled. When the passenger insisted that he wanted to fly to Chennai, despite holding a first class reservation, he was booked to fly by another airline in the economy class.

Mr Reddy said APAT had received many complaints that a low cost airline did not allot seat numbers and there was a mad rush to occupy vantage seats causing great inconvenience to elderly people, women and children.

Even some of the airlines were demanding payment for providing wheel chair to physically challenged persons and some of them were charging exorbitantly for mineral water.

Reiterating the demand for an independent flight safety body like the National Transportation Safety Board in the US, he said safety audits had to be carried out on all the airlines, especially those recruiting foreign pilots. (Draft guidelines for passenger rights getting ready, FE.B, 16.03.06, C24)

Government-owned airlines

With an eye on the Rs 1,000-crore ground handling services market, Indian Airlines has decided to ask private airlines like Jet Airways to contract such services to the state-owned carrier if they wanted it to fly the mandatory unviable routes for them.

According to the Civil Aviation Ministry's route dispersal guidelines (RDG), all designated airlines have to deploy part of their capacity to connect cities in the northeast, Jammu & Kashmir, Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshwadeep, and some state capitals to fulfil their social obligations. Indian Airlines had recently entered into a comprehensive agreement with Vijay Mallya's Kingfisher Airlines. As part of the Rs 120-crore deal, the state-owned carrier will fly for Kingfisher on the mandatory loss-making sectors and undertake ground handling and maintenance for the latter. Soon, after this, Jet Airways Naresh Goyal approached Indian Airlines to take over Jet's obligations. IA, which is trying to diversify its revenue streams, clearly linked flying uneconomic routes to contracting ground handling operations. (Indian Airlines eyes Jet Airways' mandatory unviable routes, Sudhir Chowdhary, FE.B, 19.05.05, C24)

The Maharaja will now be flying with the Tourism Ministry's much-touted 'Incredible India' logo. The Minister of State for Tourism, Ms Renuka Chowdhury, and the Civil Aviation Minister, Mr Praful Patel, flagged off the first Air-India plane with the logo, symbolizing the synergy between the two ministries to attract more tourists, domestic and foreign. (A-I adopts Incredible India logo, TS.D, 28.09.05, C24)

Private airlines

Private airlines may agree on enforcing a mandatory three month notice to be served by pilots before they quit to join a competitor. The Civil Aviation Minister convened a meeting of all airlines - private and state-owned to facilitate a 'code of conduct' and a 'self-imposed discipline' to counter the menace of poaching.

With the entry of atleast four new airlines — Kingfisher, Spice Jet, Go Air and Magic Airlines - a scramble is expected for trained pilots. At present, India has only 1,500 pilots and according to estimates, the country would need three-times more pilots in the next five years. While the ministry is not legally bound to intervene in the process of free movement of pilots, it is in favour of airline companies formalising some ground rules like a three-month notice period that pilots are required to serve before switching jobs.

While hiring foreign pilots is always an option, it can prove very expensive. According to industry sources, foreign pilots are at least thrice as expensive as Indians. Low-cost as well as regular airlines are poaching staff with attractive pay packages. They are also employing foreign pilots with pay packets of about Rs five lakh per month vis-à-vis Rs 1.5-2 lakh paid to Indian pilots. (Pilots may get to hop jobs, but with 3-month notice, Sudhir Chowdhary, FE.B, 16.04.05, C24)

The government may review the five-year experience condition in the open-sky policy, for flying overseas. Speaking on the issue of 'discriminatory' open-air policy, UB group chairman and MP Vijay Mallya said, it's a fundamental issue, but the Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel has assured me that the government policy is not cast in stone, it's always subject to review. When I'm ready, I'm going to apply again. I have the confidence that the government will take a rational view. (Kingfisher to revive bid to fly overseas, open to stake sale, Nivedita Mookerji, FE.B, 26.04.05, C24)

After almost a decade of languishing in the hangar, East West Airlines hopes to take wings again by the end of this year. After being grounded in the mid-90s, the airlines expecting a renewal of its licence soon. It is in talks with Boeing and Airbus for buying aircraft, and with two investors to raise \$50-60 million in the next two years. Senior company sources declined to name the foreign investors, who, they said, had a track record of investing in the aviation industry. A domestic investor was also in the pipeline, they said. The money raised from these investors will comprise half debt and half equity.

If East West takes to the skies again, it will be the second airline which closed shop in the '90s to recommence operations. The first is Modiluft, which is now reborn as SpiceJet. (East West to fly again by year-end, Neelasri Barman, FE.B, 16.05.05, C24)

Jet Airways plans to expand its fleet and tap new destinations abroad, revealed Mr Naresh Goyal. "Over the next 3-4 years, we are poised to take advantage of promising opportunities both domestically and internationally. Estimates suggest that the domestic Indian aviation market will continue to grow at above 20 % each year over the coming 3-5 years. Air travel is being propelled by rising disposable incomes, increasing propensity to travel and availability of lower fares. As India's leading domestic airline, we are well placed to achieve growth rates that are broadly in line with the market".

Welcoming recent initiatives allowing private carriers to fly overseas, he said that this will allow Jet Airways to capture substantial growth in international traffic to and from India, a market which is also expected to grow in the region of 20 % per annum over the coming years. (Jet plans to expand, all set to tap new destinations, AA.D, 28.09.05, C24)

Owner of Kingfisher Airlines Vijay Mallya said he was one of those studying the prospect of picking up equity stake in Air Sahara. The information memorandum, Mr Mallya said, had defined an amount of \$100 million, which Air Sahara proposed to raise for its expansion plans. He was, however, not sure what percentage of total equity it amounted to. He said non-binding offers would have to be made against the memorandum by October 30. Mr Mallya said while he was "certainly interested" in looking at the proposal, he had not made any offer to Air Sahara as yet. (Mallya wants to board Air Sahara, FE.D, 19.10.05, C24)

The price war in the Indian aviation industry is likely to intensify in the coming days with new entrant GoAir unveiling a scheme to offer 10,000 free tickets per month on a first-come-first-serve basis, on all its routes.

GoAir will initially operate on the Mumbai, Goa, Ahmedabad and Coimbatore routes. Under the scheme, which will be valid for six months starting October, passengers who book early would get a zero fare. They would, however, have to pay the taxes amounting to Rs 221. The airline claimed its fares would be 40 % lower than that of traditional airlines and on an average, 10 % higher than air-conditioned first and second-class railway fares. (GoAir to offer 10,000 free tickets a month, IE.D, 21.10.05, C24)

Coimbatore-based start-up Paramount Airways may be a low-profile operator, but it has plans to capture a large slice of the high-brow corporate travel pie with its superior business and first class in-flight services. The airline's Managing Director M Thiagarajan said that it has decided to introduce flat beds and satellite television on its fleet of new generation Embraer aircraft by mid 2006. Along with first and business class cabins, all aircraft will be equipped with modern in-flight entertainment systems including personal TV screens on all seats. The programmes on offer will include music, videos and live news through a satellite uplink.

Meanwhile, Bennett, Coleman & Co has taken a 2% stake in the airline for an undisclosed sum. The tie-up will be the media behemoth's maiden equity exposure in the rapidly growing aviation space. According to Mr Thiagarajan, the airline will constantly seek to differentiate its on-ground and in-flight services, and the cabin offering was part of this exercise. Incidentally, the airline, which commenced operations on October 19, will continue with its focus of linking metros with secondary towns of commercial importance. (Paramount Air to offer flat beds, satellite TV, ET.B, 23.11.05, C24)

Chartered services operator Jagson Airlines is the latest airline planning to enter the domestic air space as an all-India scheduled operator. India already has 12 scheduled operators and 44 non-scheduled operators. The airline, promoted by chairman Jagdish P Gupta, has brought onboard former Air Sahara CEO Uttam Kumar Bose. It is unclear whether Jagson will position itself as a low cost carrier or a full-fledged service airline.

When the government opened airline business for private sector in 1991, Jagson Airlines was among the first private airlines to avail the licence. It launched its chartered services in 1992 and is currently operating in Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. The airline will now have to convert its non-scheduled operator licence to that of a scheduled operator. It will have to increase its paid up capital from the current Rs 1.06 crore to Rs 30 crore to qualify as a scheduled operator. It's not clear yet how the airline proposes to raise funds to meet with the mandatory regulations. (Jagson takes off into crowded skies, Pummy Kaul, FE.B, 04.01.06, C24)

Liquor house Mohan Meakin supported Indus Airways will finally take to the wings this March with 10 leased planes under its belt in the first year of operations. The airline is being capitalised with a Rs 250 crore fund pool, which includes equal contribution of Rs 100 crore each from the two promoters. Using Delhi, Chandigarh and Amritsar as its base, Indus Airways plans to connect towns like Jammu, Shimla, and Srinagar in the north. (Indus Air to hit skies in March, Girish Rao & Bobby Kurian, ET.B, 25.01.06, C24)

Jharkhand is planning to introduce a unique model of air travel that would help its people access charter flights and state-run scheduled flights to different destinations in the state. Initially there would be two small utility planes, and one small and one medium helicopter. The state is in the process of buying a small fleet of 11-seater, 5-seater and 4-seater aircraft, as well as helicopters of passenger capacity 7 to 14. Depending on the demand of the service, the state government would expand the fleet. (Jharkhand mulls novel air travel model, Arindam Sinha, FE.D, 16.02.06, C24)

Foreign airlines

Thailand-based Nok Air is considering entering the Indian market in 2006, and is looking for a tie-up with a low-cost carrier in India. Nok Air is a low-cost airline registered under Sky Asia Co, a joint venture between public and private investors. The carrier started operations in Thailand in July 2004. At present, the only foreign low cost carrier operating to India is Sharjah-based Air Arabia. The carrier started operations in March this year and operates seven flights a week to Mumbai. Nok Air has already approached Vijay Mallya-promoted Kingfisher Airlines for a possible tie-up. The domestic fares offered by Nok Air are almost 30% cheaper than legacy carriers operating in Thailand. (Thai low-cost carrier Nok Air may enter India, Neelasri Barman, FE.D, 08.10.05, C24)

Jetstar Asia, Singapore's leading low-cost airline has launched its services to Bangalore and will operate five days a week. Bangalore will be its second destination in India after Kolkata. The airline will target corporate travelers, more specifically from the IT sector, those from small and medium enterprises and leisure travellers. (Jetstar services to Bangalore, TH.B, 24.01.06, C24)

Mauritius may soon open its skies for Indian carriers, both public and private. A clear indication of this was given by the Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr Xavier Luc Duval, during his visit to Mumbai. "The country's strategic geographical location advantage for the growing Indian outbound travelling traffic would be very soon passed to the Indian Government. This would pave way for Indian public and private airlines to use Mauritius as a gateway for onward journey." He also reiterated the Mauritius Government's commitment on the early implementation of rupee convertibility. Mauritius had asked its central bank to work on this, as it could give a significant boost to bilateral relations between the two countries, especially on the tourism front. (Mauritius may open skies for Indian carriers, BL.B, 17.02.06, C24)

The European Union banned more than 90 foreign airlines from countries including Thailand, Afghanistan and Swaziland, publishing the first EU-wide blacklist of unsafe carriers after crashes in the previous two years killed hundreds of European travellers.

The ban across the 25-nation EU covers passenger and cargo operators. The list also targets carriers from Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, North Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Several plane accidents last August prompted EU law makers to seek a uniform approach to airline safety. The list, to be updated at least every three months, is based on deficiencies found during checks at European airports, the use of antiquated aircraft by companies and shortcomings by non-EU airline regulators. (EU bans more than 90 foreign airlines from 25-nation bloc, FE.B, 23.02.06, C24)

Charter Airlines

After low cost airlines the concept of general aviation (GA) or chartered aviation is catching the fancy of corporates and NRIs. Technically, it means all commercial aviation operations other than scheduled and non-scheduled air services for hire. But in India, GA is largely perceived as a leisure activity indulged in by the nouveau rich and corporate houses. But now, even traditional business houses are opting for professional chartered aviation services. And companies providing these services are mushrooming as fast as the demand. Saja Air, a newly-incorporated company, for instance, is starting its operations with a seed capital of \$3-mn. Similarly, another company promoted by a group of NRIs called Fidelity Aviation is working over time to tap the chartered aviation market. (Chartered aviation takes wings, Pummy Kaul, FE.D, 10.09.05, C24)

Indian tour operators have gone ahead and done what the government has been proposing for a long time—developing small airport hubs for international charter arrivals. The latest to join the charter club, after Goa, Amritsar and Cochin, is Agra, in the heart of the north-India circuit. The tourism season for 2005-06 has already been kicked off with the arrival of the first charter which landed last week. The charter, operated by Sita-Kuoni Travel Ltd, will fly direct from Gatwick Airport, London, to Agra International Airport Schedule for the season includes one flight a week, with a week-long stay in the country. The tour operator has got flights booked through November, up to March 2006, which runs into 24 weeks of bookings. It cannot be better news for tour operators running their business in this highly-visited circuit, also popularly known as the Golden Triangle of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur. It will take the pressure off the congested air corridors to Delhi International Airport and get take-off and landing permissions easily in the lesser-used Agra Airport. (Agra takes off as first charter lands, IE.D, 14.10.05, C24)

Trends and Patterns

Low-cost carriers in the country like Kingfisher Airlines and SpiceJet are increasingly outsourcing maintenance and overhauling work to keep operating expenses down. They are looking to save almost 20-25% in costs by contracting such work to players such as Lufthansa, KLM, SAS and Singapore Airlines. Public sector carriers Indian Airlines and Air-India, who have rich expertise in aircraft maintenance with a combined manpower exceeding 9,000, are also eyeing a major pie of the contract maintenance and overhauling business. (No-frills airlines see 25% savings by outsourcing maintenance, Sudhir Chowdhary, FE.B, 26.05.05, C24)

Domestic tourism industry in India already disadvantaged due to high domestic airfares is of late seriously challenged with the launch of low international airfares. A Delhi—Trivandrum round trip costs over Rs 34,000, which is more expensive than flying to London and back. Domestic tourists now prefer to go to low cost international destinations like Malaysia, Singapore and the Middle East instead of domestic destinations like Kerala. International tourists only account for about 8% of the total tourists in India. Therefore, if domestic tourists find it cheaper to travel abroad than within the country, it would become extremely difficult for the domestic tourism industry to survive.

Conventional airlines in India are positioned to target the business segment, which is not so price sensitive. The leisure segment, on the other hand, tends to be extremely price sensitive. If domestic tourist destinations have to retain their viability they have to achieve a high level of low-cost airline connectivity.

Steady economic growth is generating an aspirational push amongst consumers. 15 million Indians travel by rail everyday. Air travel apart from being aspirational is also time saving especially for distant destinations. It is only a matter of time before a part of these rail users moves on to aircraft.

India is today the third fastest growing domestic aviation market in the world posting a growth of 23% in the last financial year. The projections are that it will grow at an average of over 20% for the next five years. Airbus Industrie reckons that Indian carriers will procure nearly 400 aircraft by the year 2017. One way of putting this potential in perspective is to compare it with China, which has 140 million domestic air travellers every year compared to 14 million in India.

Low-cost airlines have to pay just as much for the aircraft, crew, fuel, landing charges, etc., as any normal airline. The model, therefore, works on higher capacity utilisation in terms of filling up the aircraft as well as by quicker turn around.

The state governments can step in to incentivise low-cost carriers for increasing connectivity as well as to support tourism. High rate of sales tax on aircraft turbine fuel by almost all the states is a factor that has consistently kept airfares high. Another area is in subsidising the ground handling charges for a limited period of about two years. The government could possibly meet, say, about 40% of the ground handling charges as an incentive. (Leverage low-cost airlines for tourism, Suman Billa, ET.C, 18.08.05, C24)

With the aviation industry soaring, lack of sufficient infrastructure to cope with increased air traffic has led to a sharp rise in the number of near-accidents in the country. During 2005, 21 air miss, or near-accident, cases involving commercial aircraft were reported, an increase of almost 33 % over the previous year. What is more alarming is that of the 21, two incidents where a “near-collision was avoided” could have been disastrous, involving about 500 passengers. In fact, in the wake of the rise in the number of aircraft, the ministry “has started imposing a ban on general aviation aircraft during the peak periods at Delhi and Mumbai airports,” one source said. (Growing air traffic leading to near-accidents, TS.D, 10.03.06, C24)

General

Air passengers arriving at the IGI Airport will soon get a safe transport to their hostels. The Union Tourism Ministry has asked Delhi Tourism to start a service which will first transport passengers to DTTDC's CP office in buses and from there take them to their hotels in “safe” taxis and autos. The IGI Airport lacks space for providing bus service to the thousands of people who fly in daily. The ministry will ask several other agencies to improve infrastructure and make a tourist-friendly place. The DDA needs to provide land for hotels. About a dozen five stars need to be built in new and south Delhi. Budget hotels are also needed all over the place,’ Rajeev Talwar, additional director-general (tourism) said. (Tourism in top gear, Air passengers to be dropped at hotels, Saurabh Sinha, HT.D, 26.04.05, C24)

Creating software solutions for the travel industry is expected to a growing business for the foreseeable future, especially in Asia, because air travel is booming in the region.

“This segment grew by 100 % last year, and is estimated to grow by at least 70-80 % this year,” says Mr Doshi, CEO of Inter-Global Technologies. The rush to create cost-effective online solutions and services for

commercial airline users gathered momentum after 9/11, as airlines around the world, but particularly in the United States, went into a tailspin and started looking for ways to cut costs to keep themselves profitable.

"It has been made mandatory for all International Air Transport Association members to issue electronic tickets by 2007. A lot of airlines around the world have adopted e-ticketing with gusto, because e-tickets cut down the cost of processing airline tickets dramatically, from \$12 per passenger to about \$1, says Mr Doshi. This has resulted in a lot of the work of creating software for e-ticketing, revenue management and other sundry bits of the commercial airlines' software requirements getting off-shored. (Software solutions for travel flourish, AA.D, 28.05.05, C24)

Shop with your credit cards, and you would actually be earning a ticket to fly. Or you would be allowed extra baggage the next time you fly with more and more airlines tying up with banks for co-branded credit cards. Air Sahara, Jet and Air Deccan have already started the scheme, where a credit card user is entitled to points based on their spend, which can be redeemed later. Others like Emirates, Sri Lankan Airlines and Spice Jet are also expected to follow suit. (Flying returns for card-carrying air travelers, Neelasri Barman, FE.C, 01.07.05, C24)

Their visit could not have been more timely than now—when a group of striking domestic pilots have made a point on their indispensability. At training school chiefs from Queensland have flown in to suggest how the country's growing number of airlines can bridge their pilot shortage of 500-1,000 a year. The flying schools are talking to Jet Airways, Kingfisher, Air Deccan, Spicejet and IndiGo among others during their four-day tour of Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi. Their proposals range from pilot sponsorship contracts from airlines for flight training in Australia, to sending in Australian instructor for short periods; even partnering with Indian flying schools and lending Australian instructors to coach or fly planes. (Queensland aviation training team offers solutions for pilots shortage, BL.B, 16.02.06, C24)

The potentially fatal condition, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), also dubbed 'Economy Class Syndrome, can be caused by poor quality air and insufficient oxygen in passenger aircraft, according to the latest study by scientists. So far it was believed that sitting cramped for eight hours or longer increased the risk of a fatal blood clot fourfold. But a research from the World Health Organisation, published in the Lancet, shows that sitting crammed in economy class for long hours cannot alone explain why air passengers are at higher risk of potentially deadly blood clots. This was found after studying people sitting on a seat on the ground for eight hours and those who spent the same number of hours on an aircraft. The researchers found chemicals indicating clotting in 7 volunteers were higher during the eight hours on a flight than in the cinema. It suggested that low air pressure and oxygen levels on a flight might play a role. (Poor air in planes can cause deadly clots, Vijay Dutt, HT.D, 11.03.06, C24)

C30 Tourism Industry - Hotels

India will need 1.5 lakh hotel rooms to cater to the tourist flow from abroad in the next four years. Earnings from this sector are also expected to rise by 35-45% every year. According to Indian Hotels Company managing director Raymond Bickson, 10-15 million is the minimum number of tourists that will arrive in India in the next five years. A minimum investment of Rs 30,000 crore is needed from the private sector to establish 1,50,000 hotel rooms in the next four years. The country currently, has 97,000 hotel rooms in the approved Sector. (India will need 1.5 lakh hotel rooms in 4 years, FE.C, 08.04.05, C30)

Builders and developers appear to be driving the second wave of hotel development in Bangalore attracted by the boom in the hospitality sector, unlike the past when industry barons were the prime initiators. Analysts say the market is witnessing developers trying up with established hotel brands for management/marketing arrangements after firming up the blueprint for their foray. At least two-thirds (about 2,500 rooms) of the new inventory being planned for the city in the next two-four years are promoted by builders, while hotel companies like Oberoi (East India Hotels), Taj, Grand Ashok (Bharat Hotels), Leela etc. are powering the rest. More than 4,000 rooms are proposed to be infused into the market during this spell. Bangalore presently has about 1,600-1,700 five-star rooms and experiences an estimated deficit of some 2,000 rooms. The market has been growing at the rate of 15-20% for the past five years, and is expected to sustain this pace in the mid-term. Therefore, room infusion may soften room realisations but not impact demand. (Builders drive the latest star hotel push in B'lore, Girish Rao, ET.C, 20.04.05, C30)

Bed & Breakfast (B&B) accommodation is a concept long associated with the British. But with Delhi on its way to setting up B&B services, tourists will soon get cheap and convenient accommodation. The Union Tourism Ministry is setting up a task force to find out where this service can be offered. It intends to lay down parameters like locality, services offered and standards of hygiene and safety in consultation with the industry. Once the rules are in place, Delhi will be the first city where approved B&Bs would be either starred or graded according to that checklist. The idea is to provide easy, safe and hygienic accommodation at economic rates to the steadily increasing number of foreign tourists to the Capital. Since the names of B&Bs establishments may be put up on tourist websites and tourism offices, the government plans to put strict rules in place to ensure quality. If any establishment is found to deviate from expected standards, its name could be struck off the available accommodation list. (Bed & breakfast joints to check in, Saurabh Sinha, HT.D, 26.04.05, C30)

The hotel industry is facing a manpower crunch especially at the entry and junior management levels. More than half of the students, who pass out from catering institutes, are not interested in getting into the hospitality industry. According to a Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India (FHRAI) survey in 2001, about 10,000 catering graduates come into the job market. Industry sources said that though there is no official numbers available, these numbers would have now gone up to about 15,000. These students are opting for jobs on cruise liners, airlines, which offer attractive remuneration. Both these industries have the added incentives of glamour and travel. Lately, call centres and business process outsourcing centres have also become an option. According to information available on the Net, an assistant housekeeping manager with two to three years experience on the Cunard lines makes about \$1,900 (Rs 82,650) a month. An assistant purser front desk receptionist for the same liner, with some experience, will get about \$1,650 (Rs 71,775). Recently, Indian Airlines was hiring cabin crew and the minimum salary offered was Rs 22,000, including the flying allowance and other benefits such as gratuity and provident fund. (Attrition rate hits hotel industry at entry, junior levels, Nina Varghese, BL.B, 10.05.05, C30)

Heritage tourism is gaining importance in promoting India as a tourist destination. Riding this wave is the number of heritage hotels, which have grown threefold since 1991 (in the classified and brand category). According to Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA), while there were 51 heritage hotels in 1991, the number was 154 in 2004.

According to IHHA, there are many more heritage hotels in India which are not registered but run independently as heritage properties by owners.

Among the hotels chains, it is ITC Welcomgroup leading the pack with 35 heritage hotels under the WelcomHeritage banner, followed by Historic Resort Hotels (HRH) which has 12 properties. In the recent past, Neemrana Hotels too has emerged as a very successful heritage hotel chain with 11 hotels in its portfolio.

Of the 154 heritage hotels, a large number of heritage properties (close to 100 heritage hotels) are spread across the princely states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and all of North India. There are very few heritage hotels from the southern and eastern parts of India. (Heritage hotels ready to make a statement, Meena Nichani, ETC, 23.05.05, C30)

Oversupply of malls has led, the developers seeking new ways to differentiate their malls. The shopping mall craze which had propelled mall rentals across the country to incredibly high levels seems to have abated. A decline in demand for shopping malls has driven developers in India to explore other lucrative options. The new developments are based on factors such as the size of malls (million sq ft above malls) to specialty malls such as Gold Souk, wedding mall, seconds outlet mall etc to destination malls (i.e. malls cum amusement centre among others) and mall hotels is the latest form of differentiation factor to have hit the Indian retail industry.

In Saket, New Delhi, three realtors are looking forward to develop mall hotels on 51 acres set aside for commercial development. The Rs 350 crore 'Select City Walk' project being developed by 'Select Infrastructure' will be designed on the lines of New York's Time Square and will house a posh shopping mall, business centre, multiplex and a 100-room hotel.

Near that comes the DLF Retail Developers plan that are planning two projects called South Court and The Courtyard that will have hotels with 60 and 100 rooms each.

Vipul Infrastructure is also drawing out plans to develop a 6,00,000 sq ft retail and service complex on the Delhi-Gurgaon highway. The complex will also have a 200-room hotel.

The prime advantage of developing a mall hotel is that it creates a synergetic mix of components in terms of lease rates, occupancy levels, and client profile.

The Omaxe group is also planning five star hotels in their wedding mall complex at Amritsar and Patiala, "It makes business sense to have a five star hotel attached to our wedding malls as hotels will bolster saleability of commercial and retail space, add to the footfalls and become the anchor." says Kunal Banerjee, vice president marketing Omaxe.

The Galaxy Towers in Gurgaon is coming up with boutique five star hotel, with ground floor and first floor devoted to shopping arcade which houses designer showrooms.

Carlson Hotel is coming up with a 122-room hotel in Sigma Grand Mall and Towers, an upcoming shopping complex in Bangalore. This kind of arrangement suits both hoteliers and developers. Hoteliers can delegate their worry about approvals on developers and can avail ready space. Above all, they can enjoy a cost benefit of up to 25%. (Mall-hotels, Namrata Kohli, TOI.D, 17.09.05, C30)

After banning jeans for girls in Anna University and demanding a public apology from actor Khushboo on interviews on premarital sex, moral policing scoped another target. Two of Chennai's Park Hotel staff were arrested after two Tamil eveningers published photographs of girls partying in the hotel. The Chennai Police Commissioner withdrew the hotel's bar licence. The charges included violating licence norms and "obscene acts". The hotel filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court seeking to quash the order of the Commissioner. The court granted the stay with respect of the 210 guests staying at the hotel, saying they should be allowed to stay until October 1. City Police Commissioner, R Nataraj said: "For any congregation a hotel should have a 'public resort licence.' Park Hotel did not have such a licence and it had also not kept to the timings (by violating the 11 p.m. limit). And, according to conditions, the hotel has to serve liquor only in one place (the bar), but it has done so in several places (inside the hotel). All these are violations." (Hotel faces 'morality' ban, IE.D, 30.09.05, C30)

The Town Hall, where the Municipal Corporation of Delhi is currently housed, may be converted into a five-star heritage hotel if a proposal made by the Taj group to the MCD is accepted. The municipal corporation will move into the 28-storey MCD Civic Centre, work on which has already begun, in 2008. Architect Arun Verma, who attended the presentation, thinks a heritage hotel is a "great idea". But O P Jain, Convenor INTACH, Delhi, does not think commercialising the entire building is a good idea. "probably a part of it (the Town Hall) facing Chandni Chowk can be used for economic activity... but the northern part of the building should remain untouched..." he said. (Town Hall may turn heritage hotel, IE, Delhi, 02.10.05, C30)

Top government sources said the new policy would allow city five-star hotels to serve liquor round-the-clock at one of their restaurants. At present, they can serve liquor only till 1am; bars-cum-restaurants face a midnight deadline.

Sources said the proposed relaxation comes at a hefty price: the new licence fee for hotels will cost 50 % more than the previous licence, which was valid for only 12 hours.

Finance Minister A K Walia said, "The policy has been approved by the Chief Minister (Dikshit) after briefed her about the details of the policy. Now it will come up for approval from the council of ministers. The Delhi government is also likely to allow establishments to serve liquor to 18-year-olds. At present, Delhi follows the Punjab Excise Act, 1914 which set 21 as the cut-off age. (Liquor may flow 24x7 in five star hotels soon, Shubajit Roy, IE.D, 05.10.05, C30)

Luxury hotel chains have found a new address in Gurgaon. After the runaway success of the Trident Hilton, the Oberoi Group is pulling out all stops to build a super-luxury hotel — The Oberoi — with 175 rooms right

next to it. The property, which is still in the design stage, is just one of several new hotels coming up in Gurgaon.

Plans for at least six other hotels are being finalised, even as others are on the anvil. With Gurgaon having become the MNC and call centre capital of the country, there is an acute demand-supply mismatch. And with an A list of Fortune 500 companies setting up offices in the township, the demand for good accommodation close to workplace is imperative. This is fuelling the supply boom.

Vatika Hospitality group has taken the lead by bringing in Starwood's Westin as its partner to roll out a 305-room hotel on a strategically placed plot on the bustling Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road. This property should be ready by July 2008. Similarly, Carlson Hospitality, which owns the small boutique hotel Park Plaza in Gurgaon, is preparing to bring a 400-room Regent, inclusive of 90 service apartments, reportedly in conjunction with Ambience Island. The property is being developed inside the Ambience Island complex on the freeway and is expected to open by April 2008. (Ritzy hotel chains make beeline for brand Gurgaon, HT.D, 05.10.05, C30)

In a move to give fillip to the hotel industry, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is all set to allow huge commercial space inside new hotels for opening retail service shops and offices. The agenda paper of the DDA meeting scheduled has proposed a major change in the Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) - 2001 allowing 20 % of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for such use. This norm, however, will be applicable for new hotels sites only.

The proposed development control norms for hotels states, additional 5 % ground coverage shall be allowed for providing atrium. In case, the permissible additional ground coverage for atrium is utilised, 25 % of the utilised ground coverage shall be counted towards FAR. (DDA set to allow 20% of FAR for shops in new hotels, Rajesh Kumar, TP.D, 17.10.05, C30)

Pune is fast emerging as the next hotspot for the hotel industry. According to recent studies, the increase in average room rates (ARRs) and RevPAR (revenue per available room) in the city have outpaced the growth in other cities. While ARR across cities increased by 19 % to Rs 5,326 (Rs 4,458), Pune recorded a 44 % increase in ARR at Rs 5,222 (Rs 3,626), followed by Bangalore which saw a 36 % increase at Rs 11,289 (Rs 8,325), a study done by CRISInfac, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Crisil Ltd. As for RevPAR, Bangalore lead with a RevPAR of Rs 8,851 followed by Hyderabad and Pune (both around Rs 4,500). The demand for rooms in Pune, it adds, is driven by business traffic, particularly the IT and ITES sectors. According to industry players, a number of international brands such as the Marriott, Ramada, and Intercontinental are planning to enter the city. Among the brands that have firmed up plans to set up properties in Pune are The Leela, Hyatt, and Radisson. (Hotel chains queue up to move into Pune, Tunia Cherian George, BL.C, 05.11.05, C30)

It is only the second week of November, the beginning of the busy season, but hotels in Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai are already reporting full occupancy on most days of the week. Major hotels in these cities have no room for guests without advance booking.

Some hotels have already revised the rates by 20-25 %. But when contacted, an official in a Mumbai hotel that has quoted higher rates said that the basic tariff has not been hiked, the earlier discount has been discontinued. While the hotel industry is not complaining, an industry watcher said that with the number of rooms unlikely to increase immediately, the industry is being forced to turn away a lot of business, which could, in the long term, prove negative. Indiscriminate tariff hikes could also ultimately backfire on the industry, he added. (Hotels going full even before season warms up, Tunia Cherian George, BL.B, 12.11.05, C30)

Most hotels in the country are seeing at least 15-20% increase in online bookings as compared to the previous year. The growth is evident in the metros. Intercontinental The Grand vice-president and general manager Heiner Werdeling adds, "There are more visitors from Europe, UK and North America, and from Hong Kong and Singapore in Asia. They normally book online for the weekends through the global distribution system (GDS). These are customers who are not very price sensitive but are more concerned about the brand of the hotel and the quality of service. Online booking, although slightly more expensive, addresses all the concerns they have. About 15% of our total bookings would be from online modules by the next year." (Hotel industry logs 15% higher online bookings, Rouhan Sharma, FE.C, 27.12.05, C30)

Taking a leaf out of the book of countries like Malaysia, Germany, Britain and others, the Tourism Department in India is popularising the concept of home-stays. While around 150 apartments from Delhi have enrolled with the tourism department for the purpose of providing home-stays, Mumbaikers have enrolled around 100 apartments till now. The states where the idea is gaining acceptance are Karnataka, Goa and Kerala. The state of Sikkim has also introduced the concept in some of its villages. (Now foreigners can feel at home in India, Rouhan Sharma, FE.B, 05.03.06, C30)

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has decided to freeze the cable television rates as prevalent on March 1, 2006, for hotels and restaurants. TRAI said that this has been done to protect the interests of commercial consumers. Industry sources said that the rates charged by broadcasters from commercial enterprises are almost three times the household rates. A couple of Associations of Hotels and Restaurants filed a batch of petitions against leading broadcasters in the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT).

The dispute basically pertained to the fact whether the hotels and restaurants can be equated with domestic consumers for the provision of cable TV service and there were also other connected and consequential issues under adjudication. (TRAI freezes cable rates for hotels, restaurants, BL.B, 08.03.06, C30)

Companies

Leela Group

World Bank private equity arm IFC (International Finance Corporation) is bankrolling hospitality major Leela venture's new five-star deluxe hotel project in Chennai with long-term loan of \$40 million. The 260-room property is being proposed at an investment of Rs 280 -300 crore. The Leela project will be among the few tourism infrastructure ventures in the Indian private sector where the World Bank is taking an exposure. (IFC bankrolls Leela's Chennai 5 star project, Girish Rao, ET.B, 01.04.05, C30)

The Leela Palaces and Resorts, one of India's leading hotel groups in the luxury sector, announced its plans to build three new hotels in Udaipur, Chennai and Hyderabad.

The group's Vice-Chairman, Vivek Nair, said a new palace hotel at Lake Pichchola in Udaipur was under construction. The hotel is expected to be completed for the 2007 winter season with about 68 guest rooms and royal suites. The palace hotel is likely to cost Rs. 65 crores with an array of restaurants, lounges and Spa and banquet facilities.

In Chennai, the group has acquired a property at Adyar beach and proposes to build a 15-storey hotel with 360 guest rooms and suites. In Hyderabad, the Leela group has identified a prime location in Banjara hills to build a hotel with 300 rooms at a projected cost of Rs. 310 crores. The hotel is likely to be commissioned by 2008. The group is also looking at the possibility of acquiring a beach resort at Bekal tourism zone in North Kerala and is hopeful of bagging a hotel site in Delhi, to be released by the government for the 2010 Commonwealth games. (Leela Palaces plans 3 new hotels, TH.D, 21.05.05, C30)

Hospitality and garment industry major Leela Group is planning to pump in around Rs 500 crore to Kerala across various fields like IT infrastructure, hotels and apparel manufacturing. The group reckons Kochi as one of the emerging destinations for ITES particularly business process outsourcing. It has earmarked a sizeable portion of funds for developing IT infrastructure in Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. The other major area of investment will be the hotel it took over recently at Kovalam. The company is planning to renovate the building at a cost of Rs 170 crore. It is also looking at the possibility of setting up a business hotel in Kochi and another at Kumarakom. (Leela Group plans large investments in Kerala, IE.B, 16.11.05, C30/L50)

Taj Group of Hotels

Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces has marked its entry into Southeast Asia by signing a management contract with Rebak Island Marina Berhad to operate and manage the Rebak Marina Resort, a 106-room premium resort on the island of Langkawi in Malaysia. This is part of Taj's global strategy to establish its presence in key gateway cities and leisure destinations. This deal comes close on the heels of the Taj signing a development and management contract to operate a resort property in Dubai last month. (Taj Hotels in pact to operate resort in Malaysia, BL.B, 06.05.05, C30)

Tata Coffee is planning to foray into tourism by leasing out its bungalows located at its headquarters and estates at Coorg in Karnataka. The company is seeking approval from its shareholders to commence the business of tourism, at the ensuing annual general meeting of the company on August 4. (Tata Coffee to foray into tourism, Kailash Rajwadkar, ETC, 26.07.05, C30)

The Taj Group of Hotels and Apollo Group of Hospitals are looking to make huge investments in Fiji, said Mr Joseph Singh, chairman, Fiji Islands Trade and Investment Bureau. Apollo was looking to invest 75 million Fiji dollars in a hospital in west Fiji and had already held talks with officials from Fiji. The ITC Group is also reported to be keen to start five-star hotels in Fiji. (Taj, ITC, Apollo may invest in Fiji, AA.D, 13.10.05, C30)

After US, the Taj Group of Hotels is checking into Australia. The country's largest hospitality chain has bid for iconic W Sydney Hotels located in Woolloomooloo. Owned by the Hong Kong-based Harilela group, the 104-room hotel is currently managed by Starwood Hotels and Resorts. It is expected that the hotel, which overlooks the Sydney harbour, would fetch a price of \$35 million. The Harilela group had acquired the boutique hotel in 1999. Jones Lang La Salle hotels are the advisor for the deal. If Taj clinches the deal, it would be a blow to Starwood, as it was its first W hotel outside North America. Taj's move is a part of its strategy to spread businesses globally. (Taj Group bids for Australian hotel, Reeba Zachariah, TOI.D, 17.10.05, C30)

A distinguishing feature of these lodges is that they will not interfere with the existing ecological habitat of the wildlife parks. Tourists will have a choice of tented tree-houses or cottages. Two lodges are ready while the other three are being developed. Each of the lodges will have a distinctive and apposite architectural style, reflecting the character of the region and the habitat in which these are located.

An Indian head ranger has been appointed to guard and control activities around these centres. The ranger will be formally trained at CC Africa's Ranger Training School at the Phinda private game reserve to gain expertise, while an architect will also work with CC Africa's expert.

CC Africa is an African ecotourism organisation providing holiday experiences to the discerning traveller.

Regarding their foray into ecotourism in India, Steve Fitzgerald, CEO, CC Africa, says, "Wildlife in India is highly under-rated." The five target spots chosen, he feels, are far too tiger-centric but he is optimistic that the broader experience will be wonderful.

We understood we would need a local partner to run the operations, because it is culturally too difficult and needs local expertise. The tie-up with Taj is logical. It is a great brand, has good geographic spread in the subcontinent."

There is a need to involve communities in the tourism processes because population pressures will strangle the wildlife areas unless there is a change in operating models, fears Fitzgerald. (On tiger trail, FE.B, 23.10.05, C30)

A joint venture between the Taj Group of Hotels and Conservation Corporation Africa (CC Africa) is proposed. Five lodges in the deep heart of the forest will have guests resting in five-star luxury and having close encounters with the wild. The lodges are located on the borders of the famous tiger reserves — Corbett Tiger Reserve (Uttaranchal), Bandhargarh Tiger Reserve, Panna Tiger Reserve and Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh). By mid October 2006, the lodges will be thrown open to guests.

The Taj group's associate in its Kovalam beach foray — Muthoot Pappachan group has decided to invest Rs 45 crore more in two hotel projects. The Rs 2000-Crore turnover groups, with core competence in financial services, had recently parked about Rs 105 crore on hospitality ventures. The two hotel expansions, slated for the next fiscal are centred in Thiruvananthapuram. In Kochi, its Rs 40-crore electronic software park in special economic zone, is due for opening next month.

This would be in addition to a new hotel block with 150,000 sq ft built-up space. The convention centre and the new block are scheduled to be complete in 20 months.

Muthoot Flight Kitchen that went under way in 2003 caters to AirIndia, Qatar Airways, Silk Air and Indian Airlines. Transit air passengers make the bulk of the group's city business hotel. (Taj's Kovalam partner to spread Rs 45 crore more on 2 hotels, FE.C, 02.02.06, C30)

Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces and The Shilla Hotels & Resorts, one of South Korea's prestigious hotel companies, have entered into a strategic marketing alliance to develop cross-promotional opportunities for both companies to leverage each other's strengths. The Shilla is affiliated to the Samsung Group and has two hotels, namely, The Shilla Seoul and The Shilla Jeju. At its inception, The Shilla-Taj Hotels partnership will provide guests with a total of 19 hotels offering comparable service and quality. Also, under the alliance, Taj Hotels and Shilla will develop reciprocal and joint marketing activities that include joint participation in trade shows, sales events, culinary promotions and niche marketing programmes. The companies will also assist each other in exchanging sales leads and conducting roadshows across India and South Korea. (Taj Hotels forges alliance with Shilla of Korea, TH.B, 07.03.06, C30)

Other Hotels

The room starved hospitality sector in Bangalore will receive a shot in the arm with 4 new budget hotels for the business traveller. ABS Hotels will be contributing 640 executive rooms priced between Rs 1,500-2500, across Bangalore under the brand name 'Microtel Inns & Suites'. The brand will see its presence in Tier II cities like Belgaum, Davangere, Hubli, Dharwad, Mysore, Hassan, Kochi, Coimbatore and Vishakapatnam in the South to start with and at Rishikesh, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Chandigarh and Delhi subsequently.

ABS will be giving out franchises only to hotels that will be newly constructed according to Microtel design specifications. The franchisees will receive a comprehensive support package from design to training to marketing and management. (Budget hotels across 50 locations by 2010, Sangeetha Chengappa, IE.B, 05.04.05, C30)

Prestige Estates Projects, a property development company, announced a tie-up with hospitality major Hilton International for developing a luxury hotel in Bangalore.

The hotel, to be promoted by Prestige at a cost of Rs 200 crore, will be managed by Hilton. This is the second international brand to associate with a domestic player for a hotel project in Bangalore, after Marriot announced its intention to partner a Mumbai investor in managing the property in the city. (Prestige to develop luxury hotel for Hilton in Bangalore, BL.B, 28.04.05, C30/ K34)

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has slammed the disinvestment department for selling the two hotels of Air-India subsidiary Hotel Corporation of India—Juhu Centaur and Airport Centaur—on the basis of single bids without the benefit of competition.

In its report submitted to Parliament, the CAG stated that in neither of the two sale transactions was it evident that efforts were made to balance the need and urgency of selling the properties and obtaining the best possible price. The report said the valuation of the properties and fixation of reserve price was not consistent with the practice followed by the ministry in other cases. Relaxations allowed to the bidder and interventions by the Ministry to facilitate the sale, indicated inadequate efforts to mitigate the risk of transaction in a limited competition scenario, it said. (Centaur hotels were not sold for best price, says CAG report; Sole bids marked both deals, FE.B, 07.05.05, C30)

M-Far Hotels Private Limited, subsidiary of the Oman-based Galfar that acquired ITDC's Kovalam Ashok Beach Resort, three years ago for Rs. 43.7 crores, as part of the disinvestment process, is close to disposing of the sprawling beach property. A leading hotel group in the country owning hotel properties in Mumbai and Goa, and keen on setting up hotel in Bekal and funding the proposed airport at Kannur, is in the race for taking over the Kovalam property, sources said. The second highest bidder for the property, when it was put on the block three years ago, is also learnt to be eyeing the property a second time round. Industry sources said the decision to sell off the property was taken by the group following the tussle with the State Government over the Halcyon Castle and the hostile attitude of the panchayat to development works. (M-Far Hotels to sell off its property in Kovalam, S. Anil Radhakrishnan, TH.D, 09.05.05, C30)

Lalit Suri-promoted Grand group of hotels announced plans to invest around Rs 1,400 crore to more than double the number of hotel properties under the grand umbrella brand over the next 3-5 years to ride the domestic tourism boom. In addition, the group which currently manages a chain of 5-star hotels will foray into the domestic budget hotel segment besides acquiring properties in UK and US. The group has already short listed Kerala, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Jaipur and Chennai as the sites for setting up new 5-star hotels. (Grand hotels to pump in Rs 1,400 cr, Byas Anand, TOI.D, 21.05.05, C30)

Four Seasons Hotels Inc., the world's largest manager of luxury hotels, will stop operating the money-losing Pierre in New York after its negotiations to revise the lease failed. Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces will take over Pierre's management. Four Seasons wanted better contract terms from Pierre owner 795 Fifth Avenue Corp. after the hotel had a loss of \$4.2 million last year. Four Seasons is selling hotels and exiting leases to focus on its management business. (Taj Hotels to manage Four Season's Pierre, FE.B, 11.06.05, C30)

The disputing parties in the Searock Hotel case reached a settlement in the Bombay High Court with Delhi-based Claridges group buying off the remaining 30 % stake and establishing total ownership. The Claridges group had already bought 70 % stake in Searock. Today, it entered into a settlement with Skydeck Properties to buy the remaining stake for Rs 132 crore. Searock is situated at Bandra Bandstand in south Mumbai. The court goaded the disputing parties to settle the dispute. According to the court's compromise formula, Skydeck was to determine the hotel's 'enterprise value'. Claridges could then buy off Skydeck at that valuation or sell off its 70% stake. Both parties agreed. Skyrock was valued at Rs 450 crore, and Claridges agreed to pay Rs 132 crore to Skydeck to buy it off. (Searock spat over, Claridges buys 100%, IE.D, 14.09.05, C30)

Globe-trotting Indians can now own a hotel room in downtown London on a 999-year lease. Not only will this deliver 52 nights a year of free stay, the deal promises a return on investment by allowing the hotel to let the room out for the remaining days. This unusual investment plan is the baby of Johnny Sandelson, CEO of GuestInvest, in town to promote the sale of hotels to investors. The first hotel to introduce the model was Guesthouse West, in Notting Hill. Next in line is Nest, a 170-room luxury hotel in Paddington, which will open in early 2007. Rooms are up for grab, with prices ranging from 175,000 pounds (around Rs 1.4 crore) to 270,000 pounds (Rs 2.2 crore). With 11 million tourists each year and hotel room occupancy reaching 79 % by August 2005, it's clear that London's hotel market is in an acceleration mode. Sandelson is also planning to bring this concept to India. (Now, buy a hotel room in London for Rs 1 .4 crore, IE.B, 18.11.05, C30)

CGH Earth, which operates hotels in Kerala and Lakshwadeep, has chalked out an expansion plan that will take the group outside the State and even see it go global.

The family-owned group will open its first property outside the State in Gokarna in northern Karnataka next month. The project, spread over 58 acres, will in the first phase, offer 30 deluxe villas priced at \$300 per night per villa. The property, called 'Swaswar' (Sanskrit for Inner Vibrations), has been positioned as a yoga retreat by the sea. Besides, it has signed a joint venture agreement with the Karnataka Government for a project in Hampi. The Karnataka Government would provide land as its equity in the 30-room project, with CGH bringing in Rs 12-15 crore.

Mr Dominic said the group had also acquired a heritage building at Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu, and the property would be launched by the winter of 2006. The group has also acquired 200 acres along the coast in Rameswaram district and is awaiting environmental clearance for a project that will come up alongside the proposed Marine National Park. Under its overseas initiative, the company has taken on lease a heritage building in a village near Stuttgart in Germany, which will serve as its marketing arm for Europe. A new company, CGH International, has been floated to operate its overseas ventures. (CGH Earth plans expansion, Tunia Cherian George, BL.B, 19.11.05, C30)

Viceroy Hotels Ltd has proposed to set up two, star category hotels with an overall investment of Rs 620 crore in the next three years. The Chennai property, estimated to cost Rs. 460 crore, will have 350 room-capacity besides 200 executive apartments attached to the hotel. Further, the US-based JW Marriott has expressed its willingness to manage the property. The proposed Bangalore property is estimated to cost Rs. 160 crore and the board has also authorised the managing director to explore the possibility of franchisee/management contract with Marriott International Inc, USA. And it will have a 200-room capacity. (Viceroy Hotels plans to invest Rs. 620cr in 2 new projects, FE.B, 23.11.05, C30)

Hilton International, a leading hotel chain of the U.K. based Hilton group, has entered into an agreement with Empee Hotels to manage and operate the latter's luxury hotel to be established in Chennai. According to M. P. Purushothaman, Chairman, Empee Group, the 253-room property to be christened 'Hilton Chennai', will be located in the Guindy Indus trial Estate (Ekkattuthangal). The outlay on the project was estimated at Rs. 184 crore, to be financed with an equity component of Rs. 55 crore and debt of Rs. 129 crore. (Hilton to manage Empee Hotels' new venture, T.H.D, 06.01.05, C30)

Prestige Estates Projects has announced its expansion plans in its newly diversified area of hospitality business. The company, which had completed 120 developments covering 10 million sq ft since its foray into the business in 85-86, announced last year its foray into hotel business with a tie-up with Hilton International to develop a 300-room property in Bangalore. Mr Irfan Razack, Managing Director, said that Prestige plans to promote five hotels and serviced apartments in the next two years. One of them is a joint venture with the Taj Group to build a property about three km near the proposed Bangalore International Airport at Devenahalli. Prestige will have an equity stake in the airport transit hotel with Taj running and managing the property. Initially it would have 100 rooms and other facilities with an option to expand as the demand grows. (Prestige Estates to expand biz in hospitality sector, BL.B, 21.01.06, C30)

Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), which has won the bid for 7.5 hectare of land at Bandra Kurla Complex for a record Rs 1,104 crore for the development of a convention centre, proposes to make its foray into the hotels business.

RIL has worked out a plan for the construction of a hotel having upto 250-rooms, which will accompany the proposed convention centre. RIL has planned the construction of a world-class convention centre with seating capacity of 2,000. Industry sources, however, said RIL will explore options of a 3-star, 4-star or 5-star hotel which would entail investments ranging anywhere between Rs 35,000 per room and Rs one lakh per room. (Reliance Ind eyes foray into hotel business, Sanjay Jog & Mona Mehta, FE.B, 24.01.06, C30)

ITC Hotels, it appears, may continue with the Sheraton brand for another year before it revisits the arrangement. The Sheraton brand, which is owned by Starwood Hotels and Resorts, has been ITC Hotels' partner in India for 29 years. Presently, only 10 of ITC's 66 odd hotels in 50 locations in India are co-branded as Sheraton properties under a marketing and distribution alliance. Since the commercial relationship was coming to an end this year, several leading hotel chains including Regent and Shagri-la were talking with India's second largest hospitality chain to step into Sheraton's place. (ITC, Sheraton tie-up to stay for now Arrangement May Be Revisited in a Year's Time, Girish Rao, ET.B, 21.02.06, C30)

Hotel management company Sarovar plans to open 50 Homotel budget business hotels pan-India over the next five years. The first one, Radha Homotel, was thrown open in Whitefield, Bangalore. Typically, the hotels, which will promise a neat and clean ambience, will call for an investment of about Rs 10-11 crore each excluding the land cost. Sarovar will also turn into an investor soon with plans to put in Rs 200 crore towards owning some of these hotels. Sarovar has also raised \$8 million private equity from two American VCs — New Bassma and New Nernon to support its future investments. The Bangalore property, owned by Chennai based Fairmont Hotel, offers 102 rooms. (Sarovar plans 50 Homotel biz hotels in 5 years, ET.B, 26.02.06, C30)

Unlike Bangalore and other metros, where modern speciality hospitals are giving a fillip to health tourism, investors in Kerala are pitching for ayurveda, Kerala's forte, for both treatment and wellness to attract more tourists. Dr N. Madhu, one of the three promoters of Cherai Beach Resorts in Kochi said that with its basic expertise in ayurveda, Kerala should be able to garner 25 % of the overall share in the wellness and medical tourism business. He said that though ayurveda had suffered a setback due to some unscrupulous operators, the Kerala Government's move to issue accreditation to practitioners would reinforce its credibility. (Cherai Beach Resorts plans to focus on health tourism, BL.C, 22.03.05, C30)

C31 Resorts

Wilderness Resorts Pvt Ltd, a start-up eco-tourism company, has announced an initial investment of Rs 45 crore to launch a resort chain across country. Wilderness Resorts has already identified four properties in Kabini near Nagarhole, Bandipur and Bhadra in Karnataka. It plans to set up 50 resorts across the country

in five years through the development of green field projects and acquisitions. Wilderness has been promoted jointly by Mr Ramesh, Mr Murthy and Mr H. B. Jairaj, Chairman of BRB Group, a local hospitality company. (Wilderness Resorts to set up eco-tourism chain, BL.C, 22.12.05, C31)

Country Club India (CCIL), a tourism resort club chain, has expanded its operations to Sri Lanka by taking over a hillside resort near Kandy. CCIL will spend about Rs 2 billion (\$44.4million) on its development. The Rs 1 billion resort group signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a Sri Lankan tourism group to acquire the 40000 sq feet property just 15 km from Kandy. It recently bought tourism properties like "Bush-Betta", near the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Coconut Grove near Bangalore and Country Club De Goa. (Country Club buys hillside resort in Sri Lanka, Harish C Menon, ET.B, 05.01.06, C31)

A website which rates according to merit the ten best resorts of 17 States. The ratings are based on the recommendations of veteran travellers, who speak from first-hand experience of having spent quality time there with their families. www.indiaresortssurvey.com (IReS) is a 50,000 plus group of travellers, who share their experiences online. "This is the first of its kind venture in the country. India Resorts Survey has an online rating mechanism that allows actual travellers to evaluate the resorts and leisure hotels in India. These are regularly reviewed by PWC. We have listings of more than 1,500 holiday destinations situated within 350 kms from prime cities and which charge anywhere from Rs.72 to Rs. 32,000 for a day's stay," Hari Nayar, CEO and Co-Founder of Leisure and Lifestyle Information Service. (Website lists top ten 'hop skip' resorts, Amit Upadhye, IE.B, 13.01.06, C31)

C32 Travel Agents

Air-India, has announced that travel agents' commissions on international tickets will be reduced from 7 % to 5 %, effective May 1. Most other European and South-East Asian carriers are also to follow suit. Travel agents are joining ranks, with the two major trade associations — the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) and the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) — announcing a boycott of Air-India. Earlier last year, British Airways and Lufthansa had tried unsuccessfully to cut the travel agents commissions.

Commission cuts, a worldwide phenomenon: Airlines are capping International Air Travel Agents' commissions to reduce distribution costs. For large corporate clients, travel agents already operate on a fixed service fee, based on tickets issued rather than on percentage of published fare. With the advent of the Internet for making bookings, and the options of electronic ticketing, airlines, at last, have an effective travel intermediary in IT.

Value chain for traditional air travel distribution: Mega airlines are unique in extending their distribution chain through imaginative use of technology. The GDS (Global Distribution Systems) — such as Sabre, Amadeus, Galileo, and WorldSpan — are technology platforms based on a mainframe real time computer, with a VPN (Virtual Private Network) that connects travel agents with the reservation systems of different airlines. Now, with the Internet, they have an alternative medium to distribute their air product.

The new kids on the block — the Online travel agency: The success of these OTAs introduced airlines to the potential of the Internet for selling air tickets. They simplified their fares, and began to attract consumers to their portals. As the airline portals scored over OTAs in terms of transparency of price, better availability of flights, etc, their share of the OTA market grew to 60 %.

Wake-up call for traditional airlines from LCCs: Traditional airlines are at last focussing on reducing the distribution costs, which are second only to salaries. The distribution costs are controllable, if and only if, the traditional airlines attempt to change their business model. This is easier said than done, as can be seen from the boycott by travel agents of airlines which reduce their commissions.

Profitability of travel agents: The industry average of travel agent profitability, PBT/ Revenue is 1-2 %. The global, multi-location travel agents may not pass on the entire IATA commissions to their corporate clients; they also earn commissions on other value-added services such as sale of foreign exchange, packaged tours, and hotel bookings. Yet such global conglomerates have low operating margins because of the high overhead costs on salaries, administration, communications, etc.

The small travel operator has a much lower cost base, yet is forced to part with most of the IATA commission to meet the expectations of the air travellers. And now travellers are said to check the lowest fare on the Internet, only to buy from their neighbourhood agent.

What future technology holds in travel distribution: In 1999, at the height of the Internet frenzy, Forrester forecasted that the online retail sales in the US will reach \$100 billion in 2002. Despite the Internet bust in 2000, the forecast came true, in 2003, when the total online sales in the US touched \$120 billion. It is a question of time before the US trends become a global one.

The airlines will simultaneously build technologies of sharing FFP (Frequent Flyers' Programmes), and common airline Web sites with e-ticketing which connects them directly with the customer. The airline industry in Asia is soon destined to catch up with North America in sales from online channels as well as e-ticketing, as predicted by industry analysts. Today, few travel agents possess the technological capability or the financial powers to take on the combined might of the airlines. The small operators, who cater to the niche market, may survive the onslaught of technology. However, the large travel agents will have to transform themselves using the same Internet technology to offer B2C web-based interfaces for their corporate clients, offer dynamic tour packaging for leisure traveller to outsmart the OTAs. The offline travel agent neither 'owns' the customer nor the technology channels to access the customer.

As airlines and their agents slug it out over the amount of commission, it will be interesting to see who emerges victorious in the first round of battle, as Air India perceivably has a lower "Customer Pull", being a weaker brand than British Airways, and Lufthansa; even these airlines with stronger brands have to rely upon the vital "Agent Push" to sell air tickets in India. (What is the future of the travel agent? Pankaj Narayan Pandit, B.L.C, 08.04.05, C32)

Air Deccan has hit its first air pocket with the travel agents taking a decision to keep in abeyance the co-branded credit card offer with ICICI till the issue of commission to the agents is resolved. The bone of contention between Air Deccan and the travel agents is the 5 % transaction fee, which the airline levies on passengers over and above the basic fare whenever a ticket is booked through the agents. Passengers who book their tickets directly through the Internet are exempted from paying the transaction fee.

Though the transaction fee is given to the travel agents in the form of commission, agents say the fee should be included in the basic fare and not shown separately in the ticket. The travel agents claim that by showing the transaction fee separately from the basic fare in the ticket, the airline is in fact trying to lure the passengers away from the travel agents. Travel agents also fear that if they accept the credit card offer, it will set a precedent and they may have to accept similar offers from other airlines.

Interestingly, the yet-to-be launched Kingfisher Air has announced that it will provide travel agents 5 % commission for selling its tickets and the commission will be included into the basic fare. (Travel agents put Air Deccan's credit card offer on hold, K. Giriprakash, B.L.C, 11.04.05, C32)

Travel Corporation of India (TCI) has announced TCI Travel Net — the 24x7 travel centre. It is aimed at enhancing the travellers experiences by offering them a range of services through a single seamless channel. By calling TCI Travel Net, customers get travel assistance to meet all their requirements; from domestic and international air tickets, customised holidays, hotel reservations, car hire, Eurorail passes, Cosmos tours & cruises, to just about anything that has to do with travel. TCI Travel Net ensures home delivery of tickets and all travel documents. It also offers travellers the flexibility of paying by cheque, credit card, bank transfers or demand drafts. (Travellers can call TCI 24x7 for assistance, AA.D, 19.05.05, C32)

E-PLACES BOOMING E-TICKETING BUSINESS (Industry estimates)

| Year | e-travel | e-airtickets |
|---------|----------|--------------|
| 2004-05 | 976 | 800 |
| 2005-06 | 1,600 | 1,400* |
| 2006-07 | 1,800 | 1,600* |

According to sources, e-travel business, wherein consumers book hotel reservations online, is expected to jump over 90% to Rs 1,800 crore by the next financial year, from Rs 976 crore in 2004-05. Booking of air tickets through the Internet is also estimated to double to Rs 1,600 crore next year from Rs 800 crore last year. Among the existing low-cost airlines, industry estimates put Air Deccan as the leader in e-ticketing with over 60% market share followed by Spicejet (10%), Kingfisher (8%) and Air Sahara (7%), industry sources said. (e-asy bookings lead to net increase in travel, Ashish Sinha, FE.D, 07.09.05, C32)

The hotel industry and tour operators signed an agreement to abide by the rules of the game, honour commitments and not undercut each other. The agreement, signed between the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India and Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), calls for written contracts between the two sides on details of services to be provided to tourists, including food, rooms, transport, tariffs, taxes, payment terms and commissions. It aims at resolving problems and narrowing down areas of conflict of interest between tour operators and hoteliers. (Hoteliers, tour operators sign pact, TS.D, 09.10.05, C32/C30)

Lack of uniformity in the fares charged by the Archaeological Department in terms of Indian currency and US dollars, is taking a financial toll on the foreign tourists visiting the renowned Khajuraho temples. As far the charges of Archaeology Department go, for a single temple visit, a foreigner has to shell out \$5 which is equivalent to Rs 250. The bone of contention is that the conversion rate of a dollar is Rs. 215 to 220. Most of the foreign tourists approach the travel agents for visiting the temples. The agents charge the tourist in Indian currency, that is Rs 250, and pay \$ 5 for each ticket at the Archaeology counter at the temple. This way, the agents are able to save Rs 30 each ticket. The agents not satisfied with their earnings have gone a step beyond. They are circulating fake dollars and thus bagging the whole conversion rate. (Bhopal travel agents dupe foreign tourists, TPD, 12.10.05, C32)

Swiss travel giant Kuoni appears to be remapping its India retail strategy to better access the masses. It is introducing the Kuoni-badged products for the first time in the country since it made a splash in the market in 1996 by acquiring SOTC Holiday Tours. The Kuoni brand will focus on the premium traffic in group travel, FIT (free individual traveller) and domestic business. The SOTC master brand (World Famous Tours, Holidays of India, Do It Yourself) will continue to drive the volume end of the travel business, including the products for corporate travellers. Another customised product for individual families, Christopher Columbus, was phased out some months back to pave way for these new umbrella brands. Kuoni India has used both SITA, which it acquired in 2000 and Tour Club, bought in 2001, and SOTC brand names in the past since these brands carried strong local appeal. However, it has now decided to use the Kuoni badge to cut through the growing clutter at the top where several operators are vying for a larger slice of the HNI crowd.

According to travel trade analysts, the pocket sizes of Indians is only getting bigger by the year, which offers an exciting opportunity for travel companies to offer a diversified basket of products to meet every need. A Merrill Lynch/Capgemini World Wealth Report has, in fact, put the country in the fastest growing HNI category, with 70,000 millionaires in 2004. A study by the National Council of Applied Economic Research has said that the number of crorepati households had grown to almost 20,000 in 2001-02 and will increase to more than 50,000 by 2005-06. (Kuoni to tap richie-rich's ruse for holiday travel, Girish Rao, ET.B, 24.01.06, C32)

India will see at least three more travel sites go online this year, taking the total number of transaction-based e-travel sites to six. However, the going would not be easy for some of these new entrants, Mr Deep Kalra, Founder and CEO, MakeMyTrip.com, said. Investors, who have been interested in the segment, were bound to get more wary of investing in a market that was fast crowding, he said.

MakeMyTrip, which was targeted at the US-based NRI when it launched in 2000, entered the Indian market last year, and has in seven months of operation notched up a turnover of Rs 200 crore. Mr Kalra has targeted a turnover of Rs 450-Rs 500 crore in the year ending March 2007. The new players are likely to eat into the market share of the offline players.

Earlier this month, Reliance Capital, Norwest Venture Partners, and TV 18 invested in Yatraonline, a venture initially promoted by Mr Dhruv Shringi and Mr Manish Amin. Mr Shringi and Mr Amin were earlier managing Ebookers, an online travel Website, which was bought out by Cendant for \$410 million in 2004.

About 20 % of the Indian travel market would go online by 2010, as against 2.5 %, valued at Rs 2,500 crore currently. In the US, over 50 % of tickets are sold online.

The market's response to MakeMyTrip and its acceptance of the online mode have surprised him. Mr Kalra says his site sells between 500 and 600 domestic air tickets and around 100 international tickets, all inbound from the US.

Interestingly, nearly 70 % of the transactions on the site are by male buyers, and 70-80 % of the buyers are professionals in the 27-42 year age group. Most of the transactions are conducted between 10 am and 5 pm, suggesting that travel reservations are finalised during office hours! Hotel bookings are an important business segment, with MakeMytrip booking about 50 room nights each day. Currently, it has the inventory of around 400 hotels on line and hopes to raise this to 500-600 hotels in the coming year.

Going forward, the site would look at new strategies including enabling B2B2C business in the smaller cities. The site was currently working with travel agents to go online in 'B' and 'C' cities such as Ludhiana, Amritsar, Nashik, and Kolhapure, he said. (e-travel sites to multiply, but equity finance may dry up, Tunia Cherian George, BL.C, 28.01.06, C32)

The boom in the travel space continues to attract investors. Bennett, Coleman & Co (BCCL) has acquired a 13% stake in the Travel Air Group, a leading south-based travel services company. Travel Air Group, which rolled out its operations from Bangalore in 1977, has consistently remained Karnataka's leading travel agent. The group has a turnover of over Rs 200 crore and is growing at 20% annually. (BCCL takes 13% stake in Travel Air, ET.B, 16.02.06, C32)

After having quit the aviation business, the Sahara India group has announced the launch of India's "largest" travel and tourism company — Sahara Global. The new "\$10 billion conglomerate" will have 665 offices across 165 towns and cities both within the country and abroad. The company will focus on inbound tourism (travellers visiting India), travel overseas, domestic tourism within the country, medical tourism, travel for conferences and exhibitions, NRI travel services and a travel portal backed by a giant satellite network that will facilitate flight and hotel bookings among other things. The Sahara India group had been planning the launch of the company for about 15 months now and operations will commence by the end of the month. (Sahara starts travel firm, AA.D, 10.03.06, C32)

C41 Labour Policy and Legislation

After the brutal rape and murder of a call centre employee by a taxi driver, travel agencies in the city have come under the police scanner. The call centres, too, have imposed certain rules and regulations for these companies to follow.

A study taken up by traffic engineering expert M N. Sreehari, chairman of Traffic Engineers and Safety Trainers (TEST) - has estimated that more than 20,000 vehicles on contract with these companies make over 20,000 trips each day ferrying employees from their homes to workplace and vice versa. The cab drivers have been given strict instructions that the first employee they pick for work and the last one to be dropped at home should be a male. If the route assigned to the cab does not have any male employee to pick up, it is the duty of the driver to come back to the company, pick up a security guard, who will accompany the female employee to their destinations. Meanwhile, the identity cards provided by the travel agency should always be furnished by the cab driver when demanded by the employee or by the police.

Similarly, the travel agencies have also become very strict on whom they appoint. The candidates have to produce a police verification certificate along with driving licence.

The telephone numbers of all drivers have been given to the employees. If a substitute driver takes over, then the travel agent will inform the company, which will in turn inform the employee. Safety measures like stickers on vehicles with name of the call centre and phone numbers to help the public report any driver flouting traffic rules, are being followed. Travel agencies want the BPO companies to install wireless radios and Global Positioning System (GSM) gadgets in the vehicles for heightened safety of their employees. (Travel agencies adopt safety norms for call centres, IE.B, 17.01.06, C41)

■ D – TOURISM PROMOTION AND TYPES OF TOURISM ■

D00 Tourism Volumes and Patterns (India)

With more people breaking away from conventional travelling, offbeat options are here to stay. “The change is due to media coverage of unusual places, and adventure TV channels where people see real action. Treks, camping and rafting expeditions are getting bigger than ever before,” says Vaibhav Kala, Founder-Director of Delhi-based Aquaterra Adventures. If adventure tourism excites the outdoor-bound, eco-tourism has its share of takers too. Eco-tourism is all about not leaving one’s footprints behind, while unravelling nature’s mystery. But eco-tourism is much more than just sightseeing. Mingling with the locals and creating a bond is part of the experience. Travellers learn about new cultures and lifestyles, thus breaking the mythical rural-urban divide.

Eco-retreats and camps range from cozy cottages in the middle of pine forests to fully equipped Swiss-style tents at dizzying heights. And those who run these properties want to offer much more than ‘a hotel and room’. These community-based retreats have something for every kind of traveller — families, professionals, businesspersons, backpackers, students and corporates. Run-of-the-mill locales are generally avoided, and relatively less charted places are explored. (The new-age Marco Polo, Swetha Kannan, BL.C, 06.05.05, D00)

Indian holiday makers stay longer and shop to their hearts content, and spice up the economy. In fact, Berlin Tourism Marketing which got less than 10,000 leisure visitors from the country last year is engaging the Bird group to market the place. Similarly, Singapore Tourism Board is not only launching India-specific campaigns but has even designed school travel programmes, which combines information and entertainment.

Just about every tourism board, be it Dubai, Malaysia, Switzerland or Australia has straddled together to fascinate the desi-palate since there is nothing like an Indian holiday maker unleashed. The archetypal leisure traveller loves good food, comfortable accommodation (usually three to five star), is not very excited about roughing it out and most importantly like to shop, notwithstanding liberalisation which has made all international products available in the country. The last characteristic is common to just about all Indians irrespective of whether he is on a holiday or travelling on work. (Global tourism lures Indians; Singapore, Dubai & Germany Design Packages for Desis, Girish Rao, ET.C, 16.05.05, D00)

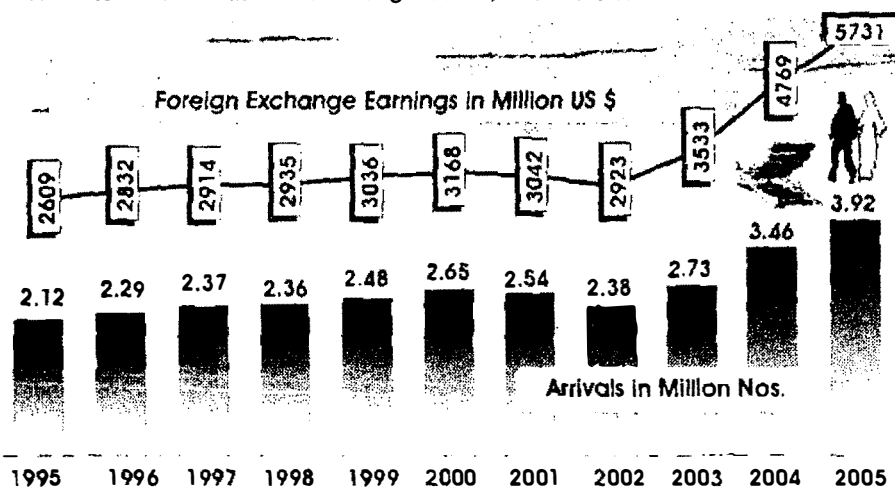
An increasing number of Indians are now searching the globe for exotic destinations, for that rare experience and possibly for the added snob value. Rushing off into the Amazon jungles or Africa’s heart of darkness is still not part of the average exotic holidayer’s tour itinerary but he is already knocking on the fringes and surely getting there.

“In the last few years, the number of Indians seeking exotic holidaying destinations has been steadily rising. What were just a few thousands five years ago is quite a substantial now’ said Rohit Hangal, director of India International Travel Mart. ‘Earlier, usually it was the third-time traveller who chose exotic destinations, since it involved more money and more of the unknown; someone who has travelled is comfortable with trying out something new. But that has changed now,” said Girija Chandran, a Bangalore-based travel operator.

In addition, the young IT crowd, with more disposable income and which travels frequently on job assignments, prefers such destinations. There are also the cautious, “though the number of those choosing only exotic destinations itself has gone up, there are plenty of other tourists who include one destination to their itinerary, like adding Greece to an Italian trip or hopping across to New Zealand on a trip to Australia.’ said Pratap Das, a travel consultant. And then there is the minuscule segment which wants to do just one exotic activity preferably in an exotic location. “River cruises on Russian rivers, diving and zorbing in New Zealand, scuba diving in the Pacific - these are some of the activities being chosen.’ (Normal is boring: more takers for exotic tourism, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 01.08.05, D00)

Foreign Tourist Arrivals, 1995-2006

Foreign tourist arrivals during the calendar year 2005 numbered 39,15,324, a 13.2% increase over the 2004 arrivals that numbered 34,57,477. Foreign exchange earnings during the year amounted to US\$ 5,730.86 million, up 20.2% over the 2004 earnings of US\$ 4,769.00 million. In rupee terms the earnings during 2005 amount Rs.25,172.28 crore, a 16.5% increase over the 2004 earnings of Rs.21,603.00 crore.



Source: Ministry of Tourism

PTI Graphics

(Foreign tourist arrivals, 1995-2006, VTB, 11.01.06, D00)

Foreign tourist inflow into India registered a growth of 13.2% in 2005, from 34,57,477 in 2004 to 39,15,324 in 2005. According to industry sources, the growth and development of Indian economy have contributed substantially to the growth of tourism in the country. The growth of tourism also had favourable impact on the country's foreign exchange earnings which registered a growth of 16.5% in 2005. Earnings from forex amounted to Rs 25,172.28 crore in 2005 compared to Rs 21,603 crore in 2004 is currently among the fastest growing tourist destinations in the world. The annual rate of growth of tourism in India is pegged at 13.2% compared to 5% growth in global tourism. With tourism touching new heights, Indian hotels are gearing up to enchase the opportunity. Despite the average room rate (ARR) going up, the overall occupancy rate (OR) was significantly higher at 80-85% in 2005 in luxury hotels across the country. (Foreign tourist inflow up, Somasroy Chakraborty, FE.C, 26.01.06, D00)

The high-paying American tourist has toppled the charter-flying tourists from UK over the last one year. This trend is expected to gather steam over the next one year, thanks to the launch of direct non-stop flights between the two countries following the open sky policy signed last year. With national carriers Indian Airlines and Air India slated to fly directly to US destinations over the next 12 to 15 months, the to-and-fro traffic between the countries is expected to grow by around 20% over the next one year, currently valued at around \$1 billion in revenues.

Of the 3.9 million foreign tourists who arrived on Indian shores in 2005, the United States not only offered the biggest numbers — around 5 lakh — but more importantly this lot were the highest spending ones.

"One high-end American tourist is equal to three British tourist in terms of total spend in India," noted officials in Ministry of Tourism. One of the primary reasons for this is that an American tourist on an average stays anywhere between 15 and 18 days in the country. In comparison, the popular UK tourist is generally here for seven to eight nights. To attract greater numbers, accordingly, the Incredible India campaign to market Brand India as a tourism destination is being re-worked with more focus on the American market. Several campaigns on print, television and Internet media are lined up for 2006 in the US market. (US tourists head to India, Sudipto Dey, ET.B, 03.02.06, D00)

The tourism industry is expected to grow by 15 % this year thanks to the fringe benefit tax cut. Also, the increase in allocation for tourism from Rs. 786 crore to Rs 830 crore is expected to enable Indian destinations to be marketed better. However, the tourism industry would have been happier if it received sops in the form

of uniform tax structure on hotel rooms as well as a better taxation on aviation turbine fuel. The industry is particularly pleased with the decision to increase FDI limit in aviation from 40 to 49%. (Tourism sector seen witnessing 15% growth post-FBT cut, HT.D, 02.03.06, D00)

D01 Domestic Tourism

The government has decided to pay more attention on promoting domestic tourism rather than focusing only on international tourists. Speaking at an interactive meet organised by PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), Tourism Secretary A K Mishra said that the focus of the country's tourism policies had always been on attracting elite tourists from abroad. This was reflected in a poor ratio of domestic tourists to foreign tourists. The rate needs to be changed in favour of domestic tourists to meet tourism targets, the secretary said. Pilgrimage tourism is one area which Tourism Minister Renuka Choudhary is attempting to promote to boost tourism. (Domestic tourism to be promoted, FE.B, 07.04.05, D01)

Indian travellers are willing to explore destinations within the country and are prepared to fly domestic carriers on international routes if given a good deal than the foreign counterparts, says JourneyMart.com. In a survey conducted among 1,150 people, comprising both males and females in the age groups between 18-24, 25-55 and 56 and above, it was found that India is the hottest and preferred destination for travellers this summer. As many as 83% plan vacation in India than abroad, the survey highlighted.

According to the survey, attractive airfare, packages and deals continue to be the prime influencers while deciding a holiday destination. 43 % of the respondents were influenced by attractive deals, while 30% through word of mouth. Travel expense/budget influenced 16% of the respondents while promotions by tourism boards have also made an impact on the overall choice of the destination. It is interesting to note that Indian travellers are willing to experiment with flying on popular domestic airlines for overseas destinations. Majority of the respondents were aware of the open sky policy. In fact, the tsunami disaster has not deterred people from going to the beaches, with 61% of the respondents saying tsunami has had no impact on travel to beaches, though 32% have agreed that tsunami has made them reconsider travel to beaches this summer.

The travel poll also revealed that 37% of the respondents are looking for an adventurous getaways, while 23% are interested in wildlife safari. The concept of cruise vacation seems to be growing in popularity with 6% of the respondents going on a cruise this summer. Going by the increasing electronic payment system, most of the travellers are willing to pay by cards. The survey shows that credit/debit cards have replaced cash as a more favourable mode for financial transactions.

Among the travellers, travel agents remain to be the most popular choice for making travel reservations, with 65% respondents booking their tickets through a travel agent. (Indian ready to explore local tourist destinations, R Ravichandran, FE.D, 14.05.05, D01)

The big myth about Bengalis and Gujaratis being the top travellers in the country is blown. Their numbers aren't insignificant, but Bengalis and Gujaratis together accounted for just about 5.4 million of a total of 33 million domestic tourists in 2002. That might seem like a lot, but Karnataka alone had 6.1 million tourists, making Kannadigas, by far, the most travelled people in the country. Tourists from Tamil Nadu made up the next biggest group with 3.7 million. Maharashtrians and Bengalis were next in line with 2.9 million tourists apiece while the Gujaratis were just behind them at 2.8 million.

That's the snapshot of domestic tourism in India from a first of its kind survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) for the tourism ministry.

With over 800,000 respondents, it is amongst the biggest surveys in tourism and is intended to give the ministry insights that could be useful in formulating policy. (Surprise! Kannadigas travel most, Bangalore, Mysore in Top 10 non-religious spots, Samiran Chakrawarti, TOI.B, 06.12.05, D01)

D10 Tourism Promotion

Seeing China fast emerging as a relatively open society and a major player in the global economy with their citizens enjoying a measure of freedom to move and the moolah to spend as never before, India is exploring

possibilities of wooing tourists from its giant neighbour with the world's largest population. The number of tourists from China to India in 2003 was 34,907. There are clear signs of Chinese tourists' interest in India and the tourism ministry has initiated a process to reopen a representative office in China to further increase the tourist arrivals to India. (Wooing the brave, new Chinese tourists, TS.D, 29.05.05, D10)

To promote the tourism sector beyond the traditional tourist seasons, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has 'mooted the idea of promoting 'monsoon tourism'.

The monsoon season for almost states, barring a few exceptions, has traditionally been the off-season for inbound and domestic tourism. Monsoon, though vital for the economy, has so far been a wet blanket for the tourism industry, dropping hotel/resort occupancies by nearly 50% and sharply reducing revenues for travel and tour operators servicing the domestic segment. Therefore, there is a need to promote monsoon tourism. Suggesting strategies for promoting monsoon tourism, the CII paper has recommended that it would be imperative to identify states that would be sold as monsoon tourism destinations. It could be based on tourist attractions, beauty of the landscapes, equability of the climate, ability of the infrastructure to handle monsoon and the hospitability of the local populace. (CII floats 'monsoon tourism' to beat off season blues, FE.B, 04.07.05, D10)

Many tourism boards are trying to lure tourists from smaller and tier II cities. In fact, these boards are doing roadshows and educating the public along with the travel and tour industry in these cities. On their radar are places like Lucknow, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Kochi, Pune, Nasik, Jaipur, Coimbatore, Guwahati, Indore and Jammu. There has been a great demand from these places to visit South East Asia. The year 2004 closed with a figure of 5.8 million out-bound travellers with the developing cities (B-cities) contributing nearly 38%. This year the figures are expected to touch 7.5 million and industry sources expect the contribution of B-cities to surge by at least 15 to 20% with the growth in these cities from anywhere between 25 to 30% per annum. (Tourism boards eye tier II cities for growth, Raja Awasthi, ET.B, 17.07.05, D10)

Information on tourism options in the Capital will now be available at Delhi Tourism's multilingual, interactive website. To attract tourists from Japan, Europe as well as parts of Africa and Latin America, the Delhi Tourism website will go multilingual from 15 November. The new interactive website will have tourist related information in four languages, French, Japanese, German and Spanish, in addition to English. (Tourism web site to go multilingual, Abhijeet Anand, TS.D, 20.10.05, D10)

Targeting secondary cities in India and encouraging leading filmmakers to shoot in Singapore is the twin aim of the Singapore Tourism Board in its effort to increase traffic from India to Singapore. Among the incentives they offer is upto 50 % of the cost of filming. They have a fund of \$10 million to be spent over three years. (Coimbatore, Surat high on Singapore tourism list, AA.D, 26.10.05, D10)

An unprecedented surge in travel sector notwithstanding, all service providers to this booming sector, be they airlines, hotels or travel agents, however, will need to put much more effort in differentiating their brands. The word of caution for the sector comes from the TNS Indian Travel Dossier 2005 released. According to the study that tracks the impact of the unprecedented surge in travel demands in recent years, North India leads the way, with a significantly higher travel incidence. While domestic business and leisure travel accounted for 11% each of the travel incidence, overseas travel was 3% each for business and domestic travel. (Travel sector urged to 'focus on differentiating brands, FE.C, 15.12.05, D10)

The world's largest travel and tourism fair - ITB Berlin - gets underway with over 10,000 companies from 183 countries participating in the event. In its 40th edition this year, the ITB organisers say the fair will be bigger than before, having evolved from a simple exhibition to a modern competence centre for the travel and tourism industry.

Those putting up stalls at the four-day event include Kingfisher Airlines, Jet Airways and the tourism departments of Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Goa, Taj Hotels, the Oberoi Group, Leela Palaces and Resorts and The Grand Group would be participating in the fair with the hope of garnering international tie-ups. (World tourism fair opens today, TH.B, 08.03.06, D10)

D11 Festivals - India (Tourism Promotion)

Held in January every year, the Jaipur Heritage International Festival is not just about the arts, culture, heritage and conservation, but also about development.

All activities of the foundation are, in fact, driven by the conviction that Rajasthan's heritage is the State's greatest economic asset and must be leveraged even as it is preserved, he says. So, even as it seeks to increase interest in Rajasthan's culture, craft and heritage, the festival must also have a direct and positive impact on the State's economy.

Initiative gets street-smart: The Jaipur Virasat Foundation has started a series of ongoing initiatives to craft a heritage-based model of social and economic development. One such programme is an 'integrated street revitalisation project'. A pilot project of this venture is to be launched in a few days and involves renovating an entire street within the 'old city' of Jaipur.

The project includes restoring façades of key buildings on the street and improving physical infrastructure in the street. The project, which has the active participation of the street's residents, also seeks to increase pride in ownership of properties and bring in tangible economic benefits to people living there. The foundation hopes the pilot venture, when completed, will encourage other communities to launch similar initiatives. (Heritage festival aims to drive development, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.C, 05.09.05, D11)

D20 Package Tours

India is not just about the Taj. Stung by the mystique of Indian weavers, foreigners are all out to explore the country's textile traditions in remote areas of Bhuj (Gujarat), Sanganer (Rajasthan), Nuapatna (Orissa) and Pochampalli (Andhra Pradesh).

'Textile circuits' have become one of the unique selling propositions for those tour operators who offer their customers something beyond the famous Golden Triangle of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur. A New Zealand-based tour operator selling South Indian textile tour package for approximately \$4,600, has named it "Silk and Spice. Domestic operators are also offering choices. One of the famous circuits in the east is Bhubaneshwar-Nuapatna-Barpali-Sonepur-Bolangir. The package promises to make you familiar with Ikat (tie and dye) and tasar silk weaving. Another popular sector offered by domestic tour operators is Mumbai-Bhuj-Jamnagar-Ahmedabad-Udaipur-Jaipur-Agra-Delhi-Mumbai. The rates are around \$2,000 for 16 days and 15 nights. (Tourists snoop at our warp & weft, Rajeev Jayaswal, ETC, 15.08.05, D20)

Imagine a group of Americans on horsebacks riding through remote villages in Rajasthan, braving the scorching desert heat. Now imagine them stopping at villages, distributing livestock, educating the villagers about AIDS and participating in medical camps. This motley group, mainly from New York is, by the way, on a holiday. Except that it combines exotic travel with a liberal dose of philanthropy. Welcome to a new concept of travel that's firing the imagination of Americans who are now coming to India to get the experience of a lifetime. And the man behind this concept is a 35-year-old New Yorker, half-Indian, half-French, Alexander Souri and it is his organisation, Relief Riders International (RRI), that's making this possible. The nearly two-week long ride, costing \$5,400 each, is organised along with the Indian Red Cross and has been co-created by Mahesh Anora, director, National Disaster Management, Indian Red Cross. (Happy holiday: Giving aid as they travel, Meenakshi Kumar, TOI.D, 11.09.05, D20)

The next time you decide to go on a holiday beware of the 'two nights/three days package' offered by travel agents. There is every possibility that you will get cheated by a day. The catch invariably lies in the fine print: the embarkation and disembarkation timings. This means the schedule is fixed in such a way that one minute of service costs you a day.

One such case came up before the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) — about a couple taken on a trip from Bangalore to Singapore and then on a cruise to Malaysia and back. They had been promised a 2 nights 3 days Singapore-Malaysia cruise by the travel agency. On their return, they filed a petition in the district consumer forum saying the cruise trip was of two nights and only 1 ½ days. They said they had been misled by the schedule. The consumer forum upheld this view and ordered the tour operator to pay Rs 50,000 compensation. (Beware the 2 nights/3 days trap, Kumkum Chadha, HT.D, 23.02.06, D20)

D20a Adventure Tourism

One day after NASA brought the shuttle Discovery back from low Earth orbit, a private company plans to announce a more audacious venture, a tourist trip around the Moon. Space Adventures, a company based in Virginia has already sent two tourists into orbit, on 10th Aug 05, it was set to unveil an agreement with Russian space officials to send two passengers on a voyage lasting 10 to 21 days, depending partly on its itinerary and whether it includes the International Space Station. A roundtrip ticket will cost \$100 million. The space-faring tourists will travel with a Russian pilot. (Now, a \$100m Tour around the Moon, John Schwartz, TOI.M, 11.08.05, D20a)

Adventure tourism in India could emerge as one of the biggest foreign exchange earner for the country in the next 10 years through effective management and policy initiatives by different state governments. Revenue generated by the sector is expected to reach \$20 billion by 2010. India registered a growth of over 20% last year and is currently valued at over Rs. 400 crore. The growth figure is expected to double this year as tourism in the country grew at 15.3% with additional foreign exchange earnings up by 22% to \$5.03 billion in 2004-05 from \$4.12 billion in 2003-04. These are the findings of a recent analysis to assess the potential of the country to become a prime destination in attracting foreign tourists with an adventurous bent of mind.

Different locations in the country which provide such avenues for adventure tourism recorded close to 1.25 lakh of domestic holidayers with Himachal Pradesh being the preferred destination, who enjoyed the thrills of rafting, trekking, para-gliding etc.

There is an estimated 10,000 adventure tour operators in India who have specialized in providing adventure tour packages to the domestic and the foreign tourists. And adventure tour operators are now marketing Mount Kailash, a pilgrimage destination in a big way. The analysis has underlined the importance of the sector, as adventure tourism is a major draw for international tourist as nearly 40% of them come to India for adventure and soft adventure holidays. (Adventure tourism will be biggest forex earner, FE.C, 29.08.05, D20a)

D20b Recreation and Theme Parks

More hotels across the United States are spending up to \$75 million each to build huge enclosed water parks, hoping to lure families — sometimes from just a few kilometers away. More families are checking in, despite paying sometimes double or even triple the cost of other hotels. A decade ago, there were only six such indoor hotel parks — primarily in the Wisconsin Dells, a resort community outside Madison, Wisconsin. Today, some 60 hotels offer indoor water parks and 98 more are either planned or under construction in various states, according to US Realty Consultants, a hospitality industry research firm based in Columbus, Ohio.

Visitors to most hotels with water parks will pay \$80 to \$400 per night per room, depending on the size of the park and the hotel's location. Yet many families are willing to pay extra, because most room rates include water park admission for four to six guests for the first and last days of their stay. (The Latest In Hotel Pools: Water Parks, Jennifer Alsever, AA.D, 14.05.05, D20b)

The Borivli police have registered a case of negligence against Vinayak Kashid, an official of Water Kingdom, after an eight year-old boy drowned in a wave pool in the amusement park. Senior police inspector Suresh Martathe said, "We conducted an inspection of the premises following the incident. It is the management's responsibility to ensure that youngsters do not venture into the pool on their own. Water Kingdom officials failed to do this. They do not have sufficient number of life guards. (Amusement park official booked for boy's death, TOI.M, 08.06.05, D20b)

D20c Convention Tourism

Interview with Barbara Hanlon, Managing director, India International Expo XXI (P) Ltd, (a subsidiary of Expomedia Group Plc, London).

Q. What is the exhibition market like in India? Where does India stand vis-à-vis the world?

A. Indian exhibition industry is highly unorganised and is currently at a nascent stage. It resembles what China or Russia were over 12 years ago. At present India has exhibition centres in only five cities, with a total indoor space of about 200,000 sq m. Ironically, most of the venues are outdated and not up to global standards. Moreover, every year there are only about 200 exhibitions organised all over India. China, with almost the same population as India, holds more than 2,500 exhibitions with the total exhibition space reaching more than 2.5 million sq m. Germany, has 2.7 million sq exhibition space and organises 300 fairs; almost two-third of them are renowned international exhibitions.

Q. What are the challenges and opportunities in this segment for India?

A. Most of the exhibitions held in India are organised by various governmental bodies, ITPO, industry associations or trade-specific bodies. There are only a handful of private organisers. In the absence of any leading international organisers, the Indian market is deprived of international shows and exhibitions.

Q. How does India gain from exhibitions? Will it make a significant difference for India?

A. The exhibition industry is very important for any country as successful exhibitions directly or indirectly benefit the country's economy and boost its global image. It will directly boost India's tourism and hospitality sector. Foreign and local exhibitors and visitors spend money for boarding, lodging, transport, and entertainment which directly benefits the city where the event is being held. All these commercial activities have a direct impact on country's economy. Further more, exhibitions also generate employment.

('Exhibition industry will boost tourism', Amrita Chauhan Sanyal, ET.B, 16.07.05, D20c)

Security lines and flight delays top the list as the events that most negatively affect travel. And the majority of business travellers do not want cell phone use allowed in-flight. As for travel managers, they say expectations from top management are cost savings and globalisation of the travel programme.

These are among the findings of the Car Wagonlit Travel (CWT) global business travel survey commissioned to gauge attitudes and perceptions of business travellers and corporate travel managers about the current and future state of business travel.

It randomly sampled opinions of 2,100 business travellers and 650 travel managers in 12 countries. Results from the Asia Pacific point toward a generally positive outlook for the travel sector in this region in 2006, with Indian travellers being the most optimistic.

In India, Australia and Japan, flight delays affect 61% of business travellers frequently or occasionally. Chinese business travellers, however, are the most likely to be frequently or occasionally affected by airport security lines as compared to other travellers in this region. In Asia Pacific, Japanese travellers are most comfortable with making their travel bookings online with 75% of them booking more than 40% of their business travel online. A majority of Australian travellers (55%) also book their business travel online while their counterparts in China and India do so less often (23% and 17% respectively).

When travelling, Asia Pacific business travellers are most likely to be irritated by other passengers. While both the Australians and Japanese are most annoyed by crying babies, the Chinese dislike other travellers not checking-in over-sized luggage, and Indian travellers do not appreciate being disturbed by neighbouring

passengers. Indian travellers indicated that they are least inclined to travel to Africa. (Businessmen optimistic on travel growth in 2006, IE.C, 26.01.06, D20c)

For most Indian business travellers, it means high stress levels, thanks to the poor travel infrastructure in the country. A recent survey puts Indians on top of the world, literally for being the most stressed out business travellers. A survey carried out by Grant Thornton among more than 7,000 owners of medium-sized businesses from 30 countries during fourth quarter of last year, states business travel is most stressful for Indian executives. Around 41% of the respondents claimed it to be very or extremely stressful. But these business owners suggest that business travel is vital for the success of their enterprise. Philippines had 22% respondents feeling stress due to business travel. Botswana and China followed India and the Philippines with 21% and 20% respondents claiming stress respectively. (Indian biz travellers most stressed: Survey, Baiju Kalesh & Tinesh Bhasin, TOI.D, 21.02.06, D20c)

With corporate culture attracting more and more people, it is itself undergoing some changes. One evident change is the boardroom shifting from the metropolis to "greener pastures". An increasing number of Indian business houses and multinational corporations are conducting their conferences, meetings and team building exercises far from the madding crowd of the metropolis in a quiet and serene ambience. (The green boardroom, Yudhajit Shankar Das, TS.D, 23.02.06, D20c)

D20d Heritage Tourism

The Supreme Court issued a notice to the Archaeological Survey of India on a petition seeking protection of world heritage sites and monuments including the Tomb of Ghalib, the renowned poet of medieval period situated within the Nizamuddin's complex in the capital.

The application filed by noted environmentalist lawyer N.C.Mehta came for hearing before a be-comprising Justice S.N.Variava, Justice A.R. Lakshmanan and Justice H.S. Kapadia seeking direction for removing encroachment from the monument situated at the Hazrat Nizamuddin complex.

In the application, the petitioner has also sought repair and restoration of the curved marble screen that was surrounding Amir Khusro's shrine. The petitioner has also sought constitution of an expert committee commission comprising independent expert in the field of art and culture to visit the world heritage site and protected monuments in Delhi and submit an independent report with measures to be undertaken for their safety, preservation and protection. (Heritage sites: Notice to ASI, IE.B, 06.04.05, D20d)

With air pollution around the Taj slowly coming down to acceptable limits, the Agra administration is taking steps to restore the serenity of the atmosphere around this monument by controlling noise pollution. This would also be applicable to religious places including mosques and temples.

Continuing its effort to check pollution control around the Taj, the UP Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) has targeted the loud-speakers installed at the various temples and mosques of Taj Ganj as major sources of noise pollution in the vicinity of the Taj Mahal.

In a letter issued to the Agra district magistrate and corresponding police stations of the town, the UPPCB has demanded the loudhailers functioning around the Taj Mahal to be immediately scrapped down, not discriminating between commercial installations and the loudspeakers installed on religious buildings like temples, mosques etc.

Incidentally, being a World Heritage monument, the Taj Mahal enjoys the special status of being protected from noise pollution with the maximum noise allowed at the main dome of the monument restricted at just 45dB (decibels). The monument has already been crippled by a number of cultural programmes organised behind the Taj Mahal including the "Yanni Show" in 1997 and Zee Antakshari in the year 2000. The area around the Taj is deemed to be a 'silence zone' with the noise limits at 50dB in the day and 40dB during nights but in reality the noise levels in and around the monument far exceed the norms specified in the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) (Amendment) Rules, 2002 by more than 20-30dB. (After air check, 'clean' Taj project to muffle noise, Vijay Upadhyay, TP.D, 27.04.05, D20d)

The rich cultural heritage of Gurgaon will soon be laid bare for visitors, thanks to an ambitious plan to boost tourism in this NCR city. The Gurgaon chapter of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), which has listed 50 such historical monuments, has plans to promote two of these as tourist destinations. In its draft plan 2021, the NCR Planning Board (NCRPB) has also emphasised on the conservation of the NCR heritage. The monuments exist as individual structures. (Save heritage, woo tourists, Plan to save 50 Gurgaon sites, S K Ahuja, HT.D, 01.05.05, D20d)

The ASI has come in for severe criticism from the Parliamentary Standing Committee for its lethargy in not writing reports of the excavations it has undertaken and thereby wasting public funds.

“The labour and money gone into the excavations under taken by ASI for the knowledge to crystallize for generations and the efforts to make excavations more understandable, becomes more fruitful only when the findings are documented,” the report of the committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture said.

The previous panel, too, had pointed out this lapse and inspite of it, the Ministry of Culture has done nothing to document the excavations.

The ASI's excuse, the report says, is that it doesn't have enough professionals and staff to do the work. In this context, it questions the wisdom of the Ministry in “loading the ASI with more missions when its not able to complete its earlier assigned work” The committee has also charged the Ministry with “lacking in far sightedness and a confused thinking” on conservation of the country's rich cultural and archaeological heritage.

The remark comes in the wake of ASI's plans of first launching two national missions — one for antiquities and other for building heritage — and later merging them. (ASI gets rap for skipping reports, wasting funds, Aasha Khosa, IE.D, 02.05.05, D20d)

UNESCO has stated that Delhi has the potential of joining the famed list of world heritage cities like Bath or Edinburgh. The honour has eluded the Capital for long. Even neighbouring Nepal has three heritage cities: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. The world over, there are 200 heritage cities with Europe and North America dominating the list. Experts feel the government now has to make out a strong case for Delhi, highlighting the city's unique facts to UNESCO. The earliest could be next year, as only one nomination a year can be sent. The heritage status will come as a big boost to tourism. Conservationists, too, want the country to seize this opportunity. With 3000 years of recorded history, Delhi is eminently qualified for the honour. (City vies for heritage tag, Saurabh Sinha, HT, Delhi, 04.05.05, S20 / D20d)

The Brahman Temple at Pushkar has been declared a protected monument of national importance. The temple, said to be the only existing one dedicated to Lord Brahma, was constructed in 14th century and thousands of devotees and tourists throng it every year. (Centre gives temple tag of protected, AA.D, 09.05.05, D20d)

The government will develop the historic Dandi March route in Gujarat into a heritage corridor, Tourism Minister Renuka Chowdhury said. Wayside amenities and other tourism facilities will be created along the route which Mahatma Gandhi took during his salt satyagraha as part of the freedom struggle. She said the corridor would be the part of the “freedom circuit” being developed across the country to make the people aware of the life and work of our freedom fighters. (Dandi route to be heritage corridor, TP.D, 13.05.05, D20d)

After drawing up recommendations for the Central and state governments on preservation of tribal heritage, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage has worked out a roadmap to create urban awareness about the ‘national treasures’ and the need to protect them. To start with, INTACH will organise a tribal cultural festival in Delhi early next year. The objective of the festival is to educate the mainstream about the indigenous knowledge of the tribals.

Besides, INTACH plans to setup heritage monitors to prevent further destruction of tribal areas, endorse tribals as ‘national treasures’, devise special incentives and other benefits, and address the concepts of Tribal Trusteeship and Intellectual Property Rights.

As a four-day conference on preservation of tribal heritage came to a close, the recommendations included documentation of tribal traditions, oral literature, customs and rich intangible heritage, sensitizing bureaucrats,

sociologists, media and others dealing directly with tribals, conducting workshops and seminars, preparing a small module for training officials posted in tribal areas and facilitating tribal representation in the national mainstream. (Intach roadmap to preserve tribal heritage, Prarthna Gahilote, IE.D, 19.05.05, D20d)

Mahatma Gandhi's Phoenix Settlement, the birthplace of the non-violent movement or satyagraha, may be recommended for nomination as a World Heritage site, the South African government has said. The settlement could be included in a list of potential sites to be submitted to UNESCO, spokesperson for the South African department of environmental affairs and tourism said. The call for the historic site to be recognised as a World Heritage Site has been made by leading members of the Indian-origin community. (Birthplace of 'satyagraha' may become World Heritage site, TOI.D, 24.05.05, D20d)

Reacting strongly to the frequent concerns raised by environmentalists over the requirement of a healthy water level in Yamuna to preserve the Taj Mahal's foundation the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has termed these concerns "unnecessary".

Attributing the spread of such "hoaxes" to an overzealous section of the media, Mr D Dayalan, Superintending Archaeologist, ASI said there was no need for concern over the structural integrity of the Taj as the monument was perfectly safe from all natural calamities. The ASI official said concerns over the drying up of the water-filled foundations of the 'Taj due to the shifting of the river Yamuna were also baseless as "most of the foundation of the Taj is placed on solid ground and not on a water-borne raft of ebony. He said that the Taj and all other monuments near the river in Agra have one common feature — a "ring formation" in the foundation facing the river to disperse the force of the river water during floods. (ASI slams unwarranted 'expert' opinions on Taj structure, Vijay Upadhyay, TH.D, 07.09.05, D20d)

Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Babu Rajiv said that a Heritage Sites Commission would be set up by the Centre to ensure conservation of historical monuments in the country. Replying to questions, he said the proposed commission would concentrate on unprotected monuments. It would advise the Centre on measures to be taken for identification, protection and management of the monuments. It would also review the legal framework for the conservation of monuments and suggest appropriate amendments. The statute for the proposed Commission was being prepared and would be ready by December. It would have to be placed before Parliament and, subsequently, it might have to go through the Standing Committee.

Many monuments were facing threats because of haphazard growth, unplanned urbanisation, demolition, renovation, negative impact of pilgrim tourism and other forms of tourism, poor maintenance and development projects such as irrigation schemes.

He suggested that the Central and the State Governments as well as the local bodies act in unison for the effective implementation of the conservation schemes with people's participation and involvement. There was also a need to accelerate the efforts for capacity-building in archaeology which had evolved into a new science. (Heritage Sites Commission to be set up soon, TH.D, 12.09.05, D20d)

From India and the Diasporas they are joining hands with the world's Iranian Zoroastrians to protest against the destruction of the most potent symbol of their common heritage. The Seevand dam nearing completion in South Iran will submerge the old 'imperial route' of the Achaemenid empire, one of the two Zoroastrian dynasties of Persia. The greater anguish is that it could also jeopardise Pasargadae, the capital built by Cyrus the Great, sweeping away his fabled tomb there.

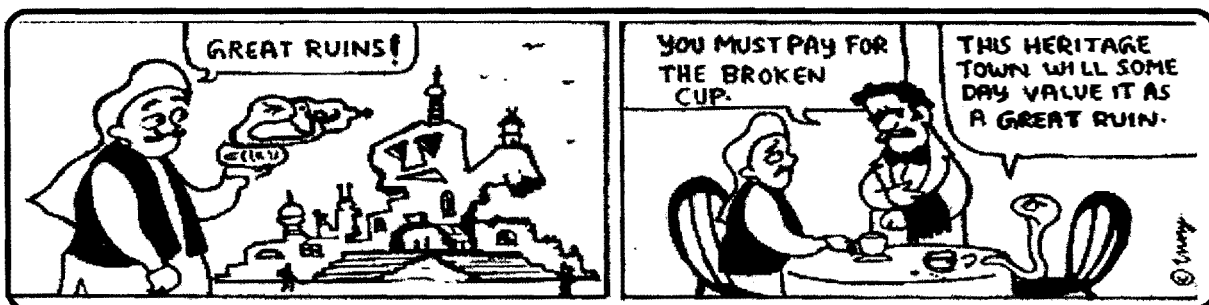
A campaign through cyberspace calling for signatures to a petition addressed to "the people of the world and the United Nations" (<http://www.petitiononline.com/Pasargad>). Initiated by the 'International Committee to Save the Archaeological Sites of Pasargad', it states rather dramatically, "We, the undersigned, regretfully have to inform all the inhabitants of our planet earth that one of the greatest parts of the historical heritage of (the) human race is on the verge of permanent extinction." It appeals against the drowning of a "rich and complex site that, since its inception, has been considered by all writers of antiquity as one of the wonders of the ancient world", and compares this to the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban. (Dam threatens Parsi heritage site, Bachi Karkaria, TOI.D, 14.09.05, D20d)

This 1,600-year-old city of Kashmir achieved a milestone, when its first heritage map compiled by the Centre for Heritage and Environment Kashmir (CHEK) was launched by Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. The five-volume cultural resource mapping, completed in collaboration with Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), gives Srinagar the distinction of being the second city in India after Delhi with a documented map on heritage structures. The mapping work was done by a group of four young architects who did the job in a short span. The organisation has identified 825 heritage marvels in the city. (Heritage map of Srinagar launched, Shujaat Bukhari, TH.B, 21.09.05, D20d)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is planning a heritage map for the country, logging in unprotected monuments and antiquities to curb trafficking and ensure they are not neglected. The Rs 90-crore project, National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities, proposes a locational analysis that would include not only the protected monuments but thousands of others which according to the project document are “unprotected or in utter state of neglect”. As of now only 3659 built heritage sites are protected by the ASI about 3,500 are conserved by the states.

Each site will be documented with drawings, photographs, satellite imagery and aerial photography to place the cultural heritage in a chronological order according to a standardised procedure of mapping. The data will be compiled from both published and unpublished literature.

The ASI had, earlier, got approval from the Planning Commission for setting up two projects—one on monuments and another on antiquities at a higher outlay of Rs 400 crore. For the mapping though the outlay has been scaled down to Rs 90 crore. Besides mapping monuments, the project will draw up an inventory of the possessions with state museums, heritage in malkhanas of panchayats. Confiscated by the Customs, income tax, CBI or police stations, and those housed in private museums and collections. A database generated out of such an inventory expected to provide “the most effective tool in preventing illegal trade in antiquities”. (ASI to draw up monument map, Rs 90-crore project aims at curbing illegal trafficking, Amitav Ranjan, IE.D, 20.10.05, D20d)



(FE.B, 18.11.05, D20d / Z80)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has carried out several excavations at important sites this year with significant results such as discovery of pre-Harappan remains at Uttar Pradesh, according to an ASI spokesman. Speaking at Hamsaladevi, where River Krishna joins the Bay of Bengal, 45 km from here, he said in Baror in Rajasthan, remains of pre-Harappan and Harappan cultures had been unearthed. (ASI finds pre-Harappan sites in Rajasthan, VT.B, 19.11.05, D20d)

D20e Pilgrimage Tourism

The Uttaranchal Government's move to open the Badrinath shrine for “darshan” throughout the year has evoked stiff opposition from religious leaders and priests. Reacting sharply to the move, Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Jyotir Peeth and Dwarika-Sharda Peeth said that the very idea of keeping the Badrinath shrine open throughout the year was against the Hindu religious belief and if the Government forced such a decision it will bring untold misery to the entire nation. Swami Brahmanand Saraswati of Haridwar felt that the Government's attempts to commercialize the sacred shrines and also put restrictions on them in the name of scientific management was deplorable and would spark off an agitation by the Hindus in the entire country. He hoped the State Government would refrain from playing with religious beliefs and

'grabbing' management of temples in the name of reforms. (Seers not for keeping Badrinath open all year, TH.D, 17.05.05, D20e)

The crush and chaos in the Jagannath temple at Puri may be routine for the faithful but it has put off Union Minister for Tourism, Ms Renuka Choudhary. Fresh from a visit to the 12th century shrine the minister ticked off its management and suggested that it should follow the Vaishno Devi and Tirupati pattern for improvement.

Asserting that Orissa was poised for a big leap in the field of tourism, the minister who visited well-known sites like Konark Pipli and Raghurajpur during her three day tour, said she wanted the state to be the biggest tourist destination.

The Minister had a word of advice for the Orissa government which, she said, should draw up a tourism sub-plan to ensure that every department of the government chipped in with funds for the all-round development of tourist sites. She said there was no dearth of money for tourism development, but the state government should use the funds effectively. Orissa will join 10 other states of the country which have been included in the Centre's plan for launching a "freedom tourist circuit" in August to highlight places connected with the Indian freedom struggle. (Crowded Puri temple puts Renuka off, Ashutosh Mishra, TP.D, 03.06.05, D20e)

Indians are known to be a religious lot and the low-cost airlines are acting as a catalyst to the increase in non-resident Indians opting for pilgrimage tourism. Apart from domestic tourists, tour operators are now embarking more on non-resident Indians to boost their revenues.

SOTC senior vice-president, Frederick Divecha points out, "the entry of more low-cost carriers and the Tourism Ministry's Incredible India campaign has helped in the growth of pilgrimage tourism." Popular pilgrimage packages favoured by NRIs include Char Dham (Yamnotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath) Vaishnodevi, Amritsar, Tirupati and Shirdi, while Ajmer is also emerging almost as popular as Tirupati. Commenting on the growth in pilgrimage tourism, Cox & Kings executive director Arup Sen adds, "Pilgrimage tourism is growing at a rate of 20% annually in the organised sector. "Foreign tourists from Japan and Sri Lanka are making a beeline for the Buddhist circle, particularly Bodh Gaya. Sri Lankan Airlines even operates a direct flight twice a week between Colombo and Bodh Gaya from October to February. (Pilgrimage tourism turns big business, Rouhan Sharma & Neelasri Barman, FE.D, 16.09.05, D20e)

Minister of State, Renuka Chowdhury claimed that she had successfully persuaded Dalai Lama to promote the Buddhist circuit in the country. Further, to ensure tourist arrivals to these sites, the tourism ministry was also in the process of working out MoUs with state-owned airlines like Air India for introducing special pilgrim packages specifically targeted at Buddhist sites, Chowdhury said. About 16 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh have been identified by the tourism ministry which can develop various Buddhist sites. (Dalai Lama, India's new tourism ambassador, Pummy Kaul, FE.D, 28.10.05, D20e)

D20f Health / Medical Tourism

The Government hopes to encourage the budding medical tourism sector, selling foreigners the idea of travelling to India for low-cost, but world-class healthcare.

According to a Confederation of Indian Industry-McKinsey study, medical tourism can contribute between Rs. 5,000 crores and Rs 10,000 crores of additional revenue for upmarket tertiary hospitals by 2012. Globally, medical tourism is said to be a Rs. 176-billion industry, and analysis projects that people from Afro-Asian countries spend Rs. 880 billion every year on healthcare services from outside their countries.

India is a relatively new entrant in this field, and it has to prepare to face the existing competition from other Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. These countries together now attract 10 times the medical tourists that India does. Hong Kong and South Africa are emerging as big medical tourism destinations. Experts said the other big advantage of improving medical tourism is that it is non-seasonal. (India, a new destination for medical tourism, Vidyashree Amaresh, TH.B, 19.04.05, D20f)

The government plans to issue 12-month visas to attract foreign patients to come to India for medical care. Last year, 1.18 million people came to India for medical treatment, at one-tenth the US cost. Nursing costs

in a nursing home in the US average \$38,000 per year, and even home care costs \$12,000 per year. The number of aged Americans above 65 will double from 36 million today to 71.5 million by 2030, and may be one-tenth of them will need long-term nursing. Hospitals are very expensive to set up and expand. But creating a series of old persons' homes with nursing facilities is relatively low-tech, can be done at a scorching pace and yield plenty of jobs. This is where India should go. There will naturally be resistance in rich countries to sending their aged to India. It will take time and patience to create a climate where this disappears. Global insurance companies should, in consultation with the government, create a system for certifying old people's homes as world class. FDI should be permitted in the sector up to 100%. The government should offer visas for not just 12 months but 12 years for long-term ailments like Alzheimer's. (Nursing as big business, Medical Tourism With A Difference, E.T.B, 01.08.05, D20f)

The widespread belief that 'green medicine' is safe and more dependable than synthetic drugs that carry side effects has led to a spurt in the demand of medicinal plants.

This renewed interest in the plant-derived drugs has led to an over-exploitation and virtual decimation of several valuable plant species. Inadequate efforts with regard to collection, processing and marketing of medicinal plants have jeopardised the income generation activities of a large number of rural people, especially tribals. According to official estimates, Orissa forest coverage was 37.3 % of the total 1,55,707 sq kms forest cover in India. However, year 2000 satellite survey showed only 24 % of forest cover as the forests were depleting at a rate of 0.93 %. As the forests are the domicile of various species of medicinal herbs, efforts are being taken to introduce the concept of 'social forestry'. (Demand for herbal medicine eating away green cover, T.P.D, 09.09.05, D20f/E01b)

With medical tourism fast attaining industry status in major cities like Bangalore in response to a concerted effort involving leading hospitals, travel agents, tour operators and hotel companies, the Union Government has started efforts to establish a national level regulatory body to ensure international standard in medical facilities available to patients coming from abroad. A high-level meeting of Health and Tourism ministers of different states, held in New Delhi, decided on such a regulatory body as vital in view of the increasing tendency among certain hospitals and travel agents to charge exorbitant rate for surgeries and other modes of treatment on foreigners. (National body to check medical tourism, I.E.C, 26.01.06, D20f)

D20g Rural Tourism

The Union Government is focussing on rural tourism to provide a new experience to foreign as well as domestic tourists, Mr Amitabh Kant, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism, has said. As part of this initiative, India Tourism is implementing a project in 55 selected villages across the country to sell their heritage, culture and art forms. These villages would be provided with Rs 50 lakh each under UNDP assistance to improve infrastructure like building open-air theatres, interpretation centres, shop outlets etc.

Besides, an additional amount of Rs 20 lakh would be provided for developing logistic facilities and starting community participation centres through self-help groups, he added.

The Government intends to provide 25 million jobs from tourism by 2007 with the implementation of these projects, he said. (55 villages selected to promote rural tourism, V sanjeev Kumar, T.H.B, 29.08.05, D20g)

Rural India has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like eco tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, farm tourism, endogenous tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism and the like. Worldwide rural tourism which offers these niche segments is a growing concept. While tourism in general is growing at an annual rate of 4%, nature travel is increasing annual rate of between 10% and 30%, says the World Resources Institute.

The World Tourism Organisation estimated the all nature-related forms of tourism accounted for about 20% of total international travel and nature tourism, in particular, generates 7% of global travel expenditure. Experts like Fillion found that 40-60% of such tourists are nature tourists and 20-40% are wildlife-related tourists.

The issue is of rural tourism on a sustainable basis. Different facets of nature allure tourists. It is, therefore,

advisable that nature is maintained in its true form. But there are instances of deliberate exploitation of nature for minting money.

In India the entire package of rural tourism is still at an infant stage. Adequate efforts have not been made so far to effectively market this concept abroad. Rural areas in Rajasthan and Kerala are attracting tourists on their own. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have started attracting tourists on their own.

Different studies are done on identifying areas of rural tourism. The UNDP sponsored project is being implemented in different parts of the country through the participation of Central and state governments and NGOs. A recent study jointly undertaken by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Rajasthan government and the credit rating agency Crisil has divided the state into eight tourist circuits. These circuits are: Jaipur-Tonk-Madhapur circuit, Shekhawati circuit, Mewar circuit, Hadoti circuit, dessert circuit, Ajmer Pushkar-Merta-Nagpur circuit, Mount Abu circuit and Vagad circuit.

The study has also identified four eco-rural circuits each in southern, south-eastern, north-eastern and western regions. (Sustainable rural tourism can generate long-term benefits for villagers, Ashok D Sharma, FE.C, 19.09.05, D20g)

D20h Golf Tourism

Playing golf has virtually become de rigueur for senior officers in the armed forces. And to facilitate "Senior officer-like quality", the armed forces have established golf courses at many different locations in the country. But the Comptroller and Auditor General has now frowned on this practice to use defence land for golf courses. Moreover, it has criticised the fact that armed forces have been crediting the revenue earned from these courses to non-public funds". The IAF, for instance, has six golf courses at New Delhi, Bangalore, Baroda, Allahabad, Nagpur and Hindon. The CAG selected golf courses at Bangalore and Baroda for a detailed audit scrutiny. (Audit report slams defence golf courses, TOI.D, 09.05.05, D20h)

The National Capital Region (NCR) promises to be the next big hot spot of this multi-billion dollar golf business worldwide. NCR today boasts of five world-class golf courses: Delhi Golf Club (GC) in Delhi, Classic Golf Resort, DLF GC, Golden Greens GC – all in Gurgaon, and Jaypee Greens GC in Greater Noida. All these courses have involved investments of at least Rs 100 crore each. (NCR tees off to a new high in golf tourism, Navneet Anand, TOI.D, 29.05.05, D20h)

Priced at Rs 3 crore, almost 90% of the 300 luxury flats in Magnolias have been sold out. And this, when the DLF group's project is still on paper. Buyers were more interested in the fact that the proposed complex shares its boundary wall with an exuberant golf course. Magnolias, which is second in the series of the high-end luxury homes, is preceded by the Aralias, overlooking the golf course. The Aralias, like Magnolias, was a special "by invitation only" project launched by the DLF in late 2002. (Buyers tee off to DLF project for golf course, Payal Saxena, TOI.D, 03.10.05, D20h)

D20i Eco Tourism

Taking note of the conflict between national parks and local people, Himachal Pradesh has come out with a model to encourage participatory management to promote eco-tourism.

The first move is to curtail government spending and encourage locals to take part in the promotion of eco-tourism. Second, to convert the lion safari at Renuka and the Great Himalayan National Park at Kufri by handing over management to independent societies.

The famous tourist destination of Khajjiar in Chamba district, Manikaran and Banjar valleys in Kullu and the Chansel ski slopes in the Rohru area of Shimla district are also being converted into societies.

Sources in the state government said that this had been done following the lessons learnt from the experience in the 'Valley of Flowers' in Chamoli district in Uttaranchal. The valley, once described as one of the most beautiful in the world, is today choked with weeds.

Experts say the tall grass growing here led to flowers becoming extinct. Thanks to a ban on the entry of locals into the valley after it was declared a national park. Earlier, locals had free access with their cattle, which used to graze there and prevent the proliferation of weeds. Himachal government has therefore decided to involve locals in the development of key tourist destinations to make these self-sustainable. Government sources say these societies could promote eco-tourism. The state is home to three zoos, 29 wildlife sanctuaries and three Himalayan national parks. The government decided to locate the forest department infrastructure in places of tourist interest at these societies' disposal. The societies charge entry fees and other levies from tourists.

The picturesque nature park at Manali has also been converted into a society. The results have been encouraging. Locals have been instrumental in bringing more tourists to trekking routes that are being regulated by them on an experimental basis in the Manikaran and Banjar valleys, popular tourist destinations. Encouraged by the response, the government has decided to involve people in regulation of ground water resources and monitoring of quality of drinking water. (Locals are back in parks, helping eco-tourism, Charanjit Ahuja, FE.C, 26.12.05, D20i)

D20j Culture Tourism

The Union Cabinet approved a proposal to ratify the UNESCO Convention for safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. It also agreed to contribute to the "Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" at least every two years.

Mr Jaipal Reddy, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, said, "For the purpose of this Convention, international assistance could be obtained to safeguard those forms of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding." (Cabinet nod for UNESCO proposal on cultural, heritage, BL.B, 06.07.05, D20j)

Holding a cultural event on a heritage site within the city has become a matter of monumental expense. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) charges the organisers anything between Rs 25,000-Rs 50,000 daily for such an event, whereas the fee is as low as Rs 10,000-Rs 25,000 in other cities.

Even the refundable security-fee is a steep Rs 50,000 per day here, while in other places, organisers would need to deposit Rs 30,000 daily. What's more, the rules that were formulated some time back, stipulate that no permission would be granted for a function where admission fee is charged or tickets sold.

The government has identified eight places where cultural events "of high standards, preferably classical music, dance and drama" may be permitted by the ASI Arab ki Sarai and outer lawns of Isa Khan's Tomb in Humayun's Tomb: open areas at Qutab Minar complex, Quara Pithora, Red Fort (area of Ram Lila and inside); Roshanara Garden and Talab Mahal. (ASI's monumental rates for cultural events, Saurabh Sinha, TOI.D, 04.09.05, D20j)

New Forms

In December last year a city-based tour operator organised a package for a group of 26 Australians, who spent 22 days in South India tasting and learning the cuisines here. So impressed was the group that it has promised to come back this year for more.

The itinerary was simple: each day, the group travelled to a new place and learnt of five local dishes. In Mysore, they were taught Mysore Pak while in Coorg it was pandi curry and kadambuttu; in Kerala it was Malabar and Syrian Christian food, while in Tamil Nadu it was Chettinad and other cuisines. "It was a little like turning tourism on its head. In between cooking and sampling, the tourists got to see the local attractions, the tour operator said.

Though still in its infancy in India, the potential for food tourism is enormous and is extremely popular in the UK, Europe USA and China. In Ireland exclusive catering houses take in candidates and tourists for two-three weeks of culinary training.

The country is seeing a host of speciality tours related to food. Wine tours are currently done in a few vine yards in Karnataka and Maharashtra, while pub-hopping, though slightly on the wane now, is still a done thing.

At the other extreme is the organic farm experience started by a few farmers in Maharashtra, where tourists can stay on farms for two-four weeks and work with farmers. The accommodation is rustic; food is basic and work, back-breaking. (What's cooking? It's food tourism, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 16.04.05)

For those fascinated by the macabre and catastrophic, the hair-raising and gut wrenching episodes of history, there's an entire industry of tour operators waiting to take you to graveyards, and battlefields, to the darkest torture chambers and even on the track of serial killers. They call it Dark Tourism.

Curious visitors

Even before the debris could be cleared from Ground Zero, a viewing platform had to be erected for the hundreds of curious visitors who trooped in, some even posing for cameras. The subway route that once ended under the World Trade Centre now breaks into the city's surface.

The book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* co-authored by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, discusses this 20th century phenomenon. The two authors believe it all started with the sinking of the Titanic. Other tragedies were too old to obsess over or sell successfully.

In Dallas, Texas, you can actually take a Cadillac ride with the accompanying soundtrack of cheering crowds. It ends with the sound of a gunshot that Kennedy in all likelihood never heard. Jack-the-Ripper-walks are hugely popular in London. Not so high on the list is the infamous nuclear reactor at Chernobyl; despite the risk of exposure to radiation.

You could visit the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Or you could visit the Robben Island — lies 12 km off the South African coast — where Nelson Mandela spent 27 years of his life.

Asia's list

Although some experts like Lennon and Foley believe dark tourism is a predominantly western trend promoted by crafty marketing skills, Asia has its own list. There's the chilling sight of thousands of skulls at the Killing Fields of Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh.

In India, nearly 10,000 people visit the Jallianwala Bagh each day, says Balraj Singh, Tourist officer at Amritsar. The Cellular Jail at Andamans, another National Memorial, which will be 100 years old on March 10, 2006, also gets its share of curious visitors. (Walk on the dark side, Meera Mohanty, TH.B, 05.02.06)

■ E – TOURISM, SOCIETY AND IMPACTS ■

E00 Social Impact of Tourism

Islamist groups in Zanzibar are worried by what they see as increasingly inappropriate behaviour by Western tourists, saying their actions offend the Indian ocean islands' conservative Muslim culture. The organisations are also concerned about the spread of bars on the islands off mainland Tanzania, whose beaches and coral reefs make it a haven for honeymooners. "Tourists should not indulge in sex acts or kiss openly, this is not something that people can accept," Farid Hadi, chairman of the Zanzibar Imams' association (Jumaza), said. (No kissing please! IE.C, 05.05.05, E00)

Foreign tourists getting married as per Hindu rituals in Rajasthan is a common thing. But one such couple, who kissed each other during the ceremony, has created ripples in the holy Pushkar, with local priests lodging a FIR against them. The controversy started after an Israeli couple got married in the traditional way and sealed the wedding with a kiss. Since then the priest community has been fuming over this public display of passion at a holy place like Pushkar.

Terming it a clear violation of religious sentiments and norms, Sri Tirth Guru Purohit Sangh Trust has lodged a complaint with the police against the couple. Though kissing among tourists is a common scene at public places in Pushkar, this is the first instance when a police case has been lodged against any foreigner for hurting religious sentiments. What enraged the priests the most was the fact that the Israeli duo started embracing and kissing each other while the Vedic hymns were being chanted. The couple claimed that they were encouraged by locals to go for a kiss during the wedding ceremony. They also said that they respect the sanctity of the holy place but if kissing was against the religious sentiments, the priests should have cautioned them beforehand. Pushkar has seen a rapid increase of tourists from Israel in recent years, who stay here for months. Last year, a striptease dance by an Israel troupe had snowballed into a major controversy that ultimately led to the removal of the district collector, who was present at the show. (No kissing at Pushkar weddings, Ranjeet S Jamwal, TS.D, 11.09.05, E00)

- ◆ Smoking and drinking, however innocent, are considered as symbols of moral laxity among Indians.
- ◆ Hugging, embracing and kissing a woman in public is out of question in society. Also, women never approach a stranger for a casual conversation.

These are just some of the nuggets of wisdom in the administration's new morality guide to Pushkar's foreign tourists. Concerned about the rising incidents of 'cultural clashes' between the pandits of Pushkar and the foreign tourists, the Ajmer administration is trying to broker peace through a rule book for the visitors.

The 20-page book, drafted published and distributed by the administration, indicates that Indians consider smoking and drinking as symbols of moral laxity and consider any public display of affection with women as social taboo.

The administration is hoping that a conservative portrayal of the Indian culture would deter the tourists from behaving in a manner that would incense the local priests, who have been at loggerheads with tourists, saying that they have been polluting the holy city. Prithvi Raj Sankhla, SDM of Ajmer, feels that by warning the tourists, such cultural dashes could be averted. A week ago, a Finnish tourist bathed on the ghats in the nude and then walked down to her hotel. The priests created a furore and filed a case against her. In 2004, priests had launched a stir when a group of Israeli women "stripped" on the outskirts of Pushkar during a private party. (Pushkar to have rule book for tourists, Sandipan Sharma, IE.C, 19.11.05, E00)

E01 Environmental Impact of Tourism

Union Tourism Minister Mrs Renuka Chowdhury said in the Lok Sabha that unless the people's concerns

arising out of the debilitating environmental situation in the Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forests, were adequately addressed, it would be 'very difficult' for her to "market" the region as a prime tourist location of the country. "Sunderbans is causing anxious moments," the Minister said while responding to a supplementary question on rural tourism by Mr Basudev Barman (CPI-M). She said a group of people had appealed to MPs drawing their attention to environmental degradation taking place in the ecologically sensitive region. Mr Barman wanted the Minister to take steps to develop Sunderbans as part of her rural tourism development scheme. (Sunderbans really worries Renuka, TS.D, 10.05.05, E01)

The hospitality division of the Muthoot Group is to focus on conservation tourism and is readying a boutique of small projects with lesser environment impact. A part of the group's revenue will be set aside for conservation projects like protection of a species and also support a project of the tribal people, according to division executive director M George.

About the boutique of projects, he said they would be high-end resorts with not over 20 rooms. The aim was not rapid expansion, but create a sustained destination and take the lead in this initiative. The projects would be in beach and backwater destination: The division had evolved a strategy to enter agricultural tourism so that the industry could regain its status, he added. (Muthoot's hospitality division to focus on conservation projects, FE.B, 19.05.05, E01)

The Environment Ministry of the Delhi government has made it mandatory for all five star, four-star hotels, restaurants with more than 100 seats and hospitals to use degradable plastic bags. As per a notification issued by the Ministry in this regard, first time violators will be fined Rs 10,000, the second and subsequent defaulters will be fined Rs 20,000. The Sriram Institute for Industrial Research, council for Scientific and Institutional Research (CSIR), Central Institute for Plastic Engineering and Technology (CIPEE Chennai) have been short listed by the Ministry for providing the degradability certification. The Certificate of degradability is made mandatory for all the above hotels and restaurants. On an average the monthly consumption of any five-star hotel ranges between 3,000-4,000 bags. While most of them have already moved to degradable plastic bags, others are looking for agencies which provide the degradable plastic bags. (Degradable plastic bags must for hospitals, star hotels, Environment Ministry to hold surprise checks and fine violators, Teena Thacker, IE.D, 30.08.05, E01)

The founders of the Rough Guides and Lonely Planet books, troubled that they have helped spread a casual attitude towards air travel that could trigger devastating climate change, are uniting to urge tourists to fly less. Mark Ellingham the founder of Rough Guides, and Tony Wheeler, who created Lonely Planet after taking the hippie trail across Asia, want fellow travellers to "fly less and stay longer" and donate money to carbon offsetting schemes. From next month, warnings will appear in all new editions of their guides about the impact of flying on global warming alongside alternative ways of reaching certain destinations.

But the founders of the UK's two biggest travel publishers are refusing to give up flying and admit they are not paragons of environmental virtue. Both men have also pledged to donate money to the charity Climate Care to offset the carbon emissions of their 650 staff who fly around the world every year compiling and updating their travel books. In Rough Guides, the warnings will come under the "getting there" sections of all new editions and will emphasize alternative forms of travel. While air travel is predicted to increase threefold in the next 20 years, Ellingham denied his company had encouraged the surge in flying. (Travel guides urge less flying, HT.D, 05.03.06, E01)

Ecological footprinting was devised in the 1990s. A kind of ecological accounting, footprinting measures human resource consumption and waste levels (both of which are increasing) against the earth's biocapacity, which includes the amount of biologically productive space available and the capacity of the earth to absorb waste and pollution, and to regenerate.

Our "fair share" of the globe's resources works out to around two hectares per person a year, whereas the average person in the United Kingdom requires 5.3 hectares each (the equivalent of six football pitches).

Craig Simmons, co-author of *Sharing Nature's Interest*, insists that footprinting is crucial because it gives us a snapshot of our impact at a global, national, regional and personal level. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Simmons recommends calling time on unnecessary air travel: "Dollar for dollar, cheap flights have a huge impact. A

flight to the east coast of America can add another two to three hectares on to your personal footprint for the year.”

Less obvious, but increasingly significant, is the amount of electronic gadgets and appliances we let into our lives each year. (How can I calculate my ‘eco footprint’? We are consuming more and dumping more than ever before. A guide on how to shrink your ecological shoe size, Lucy Siegle, TH.B, 06.03.06, E01)

E01a Environmental Laws and Policy

The draft National Environment Policy (NEP) released by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest emphasises ‘polluter pays’, ‘cost-minimisation’ and market-based incentives for pollution control. A logical follow up should be to vest stewardship of natural resources with communities that are directly dependent on them. NEP, however, falls short here. This lacuna is glaring because most common resources in India degenerate into open resources, over which local communities have very little control.

People who converted forests into agricultural land, and then into residential or commercial land, received property titles, but those who let the forests stand are now told that these forests belong to all people, not just to them. This is grave injustice. NEP does talk of mending matters and giving legal recognition to forest dwellers’ traditional rights. But then, how exactly to recognise traditional rights? NEP only has trite suggestions of partnerships between communities and forest department officials, and arguments to universalise Joint Forest Management (JFM).

Of course, JFM does encourage community participation. But it offers communities no long-term stake in improving forests. Moreover, where is the legal mechanism that guarantees revenue sharing between the forest department and communities? JFM needs to move towards community forestry management and recognize communities as custodians or stewards of forests. The forest department should merely act as an advisor or consultant. The NEP recognises that improper pricing policies for water, electricity and fuels have led to water misuse. However, it does not clearly articulate the way to rationalize these policies. It also fails to emphasise that pricing is but a subset of the issue of the user rights to water.

A way to allocate water rights would be to firm up the system of ‘project allocations’ used by the government today. Project authorities enter into long-term contracts with municipal corporations and other government agencies for supply of fixed quantities of water. These quantitative allocations should be converted to legally enforceable proportional allocations to water user associations. These rights should be tradable. This approach is very different from the emerging practice of privatising river waters by leasing several kilometres of them to private companies - our method only formalises existing claims.

But what about families who cannot afford to pay? The government can either decide on ‘free’ allocation per person or per family - then pay for that water from the general tax revenue. This quota is for all - the rich as well as the poor. Water consumed above this ‘free’ quota will have to be paid by each family. As recourse, the authorities can subsidise only the poor and make the rich pay for every drop of water they consume. (It’s just the basic, Parth J Shah & H B Soumya, IE.C, 05.06.05, E01a)

Replace the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972, the Indian Forest Act (IFA) 1927 and the Forest (Tribal Rights) Bill 2005 with an integrated piece of legislation. The Renewable Natural Resource (Conservation) Act, which incorporates the good parts of all the three above and is futuristic in its vision and application and does not suffer either from the siege mentality of the WPA which revels in prohibition of all sorts or the free for all mandate of the tribal bill.

The nation needs a law that has gone through the rigour of a good working draft followed by public hearings, expert debates and active discussion in Parliament, all with a pre-agreed timeframe.

- ◆ Focus on the whole and not just the parts.
- ◆ Focus on trends and not numbers.
- ◆ Focus on frontlines and top lines.
- ◆ Focus on locals.

(Forests: for a holistic, futuristic vision, Manoj Kumar Misra, TH.B, 31.07.05, E01a)

Activists, environment groups and individuals are protesting the secretive ways of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The Ministry has finalised a draft of the National Environment Policy (NEP) and submitted it to the Cabinet for approval, without making the policy public, as stipulated under the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2004. Over 70 citizens' groups and individuals have written to the Prime Minister to make it public. The first draft of the NEP was filled with contradictions. The revised draft should have been shown to us, and national consultations held with citizens, before it was sent to the Cabinet," said Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh. (What are the babus hiding? Anupama Javaraman, IE.B, 29.08.05, E01a)

For the first time, the apex court has put in place a system to evaluate and collect the environmental cost of any project in forest land. Until now, the cost included just that of trees felled. But in a 70 page judgment, the Supreme Court has ordered that projects be charged Net Present Value (NPV); value of benefits from a forest including oxygen production, biodiversity, carbon absorption and flood and drought control. The only projects exempted will be government hospitals, dispensaries, non commercial government ventures like schools, water tanks, sewers. The NPV collected will go to a national corpus that will be audited by CAG and used for preserving forests, not necessarily in the state where the project is coming up. This is over and above the current system of compensatory afforestation.

NPV is already being charged by four states – Bihar, Chattisgarh, Maharastra and Haryana. More than Rs 300 crore has been collected so far and is lying with the courts with no clarity on what to do with the money. The plea that public sector projects of NHPC or Power—grid be exempted has been turned down by a three – member bench headed by Justice Y K Sabharwal who delivered the judgment after a continuous three-day hearing on an omnibus forest case. (SC defines 'green' cost for projects built on forest land, Sonu Jain, IE.D, 29.09.05, E01a)

The final technical report of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) has said that India has lost over half of its forest cover, 40 % of its mangroves, and a significant part of its wetlands in the past couple of centuries.

The report "Securing India's Future: The Final Technical Report of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan" released was originally supposed to have been an official report of the Union Environment and Forests Ministry. It was made public as a citizen's report since the Ministry had failed to act on it for almost two years.

Citing habitat destruction, hunting and over-exploitation as the immediate causes of biodiversity loss, the report said that behind these factors were an unsustainable and insensitive model of 'development,' breakdown of traditional management practices and institutions, centralisation of decision-making powers in the government, serious social and economic inequities, changes in moral and cultural values and lack of recognition of the full value of biodiversity in economic planning. The scenario was worsened by globalisation, it said. In January 2000, the Ministry facilitated the NBSAP process, starting with the unusual step of giving its technical coordination to Kalpvriksh, working in conjunction with a 15-member technical and policy core group. The project was funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) by the United Nations Development Programme. The final report was submitted to the Ministry in 2003. Until then, the Ministry had indicated that it would be the national plan.

Stressing on more decentralised governance and administration, it said there was a need for a national land and water use plan besides re-orientation of agriculture, industry, infrastructure and other development sectors. It highlighted the need for central involvement of communities most dependent on biological resources and expansion of areas and species under conservation. (50 % forests lost, says report, TH.D, 05.10.05, E01a)

Six countries including India and China will form an Asia Pacific initiative as a 'parallel to the Kyoto protocol and will meet in Sydney next month to discuss effective methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Calling the Kyoto protocol a failure, Australia's industry minister Ian Macfarlane said the new Asia Pacific forum - including Australia, India, China, United States, Japan and South Korea - will be more effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The grouping, which represent half the world's economy', will meet for the first partnership on clean development and climate discussions. (Six countries in bid to form parallel to Kyoto, FE.B, 31.12.05, E01a)

E01b Environmental Issues

A new wave of industrialisation threatens to make the people of Orissa environmental refugees in their own land. The State's air, water, wildlife and people's livelihoods are being destroyed by the so-called industrial blitzkrieg, according to environmentalists. Spurred by the spiralling demand for steel and aluminium in the international market, several conglomerates have come forward to set up metal production units to exploit the mineral resources of the State. The industrialisation boom is expected to result in massive environmental degradation since the local environment has a limited "carrying capacity" to absorb and assimilate effluents and wastes produced due to such gigantic production facilities being squeezed within a very short time. ('Industrialisation will harm Orissa's ecology greatly', Prafulla Das, BL.C, 07.06.05, E01b)

E01c Forests

The efforts of a band of women to conserve and develop mangrove forests are creating a revolution in the hinterland of Chettuva. With the support of the Habitat Science Teaching Community, Department of Social Forestry, Gymkhana Club and Little Flower College, the women plant the saplings around ponds in their houses and re-plant them, after a few months, in the mangrove forest at Azhimukhom in Kadappuram panchayat, 25 km from Thrissur. This is perhaps the first time in the country that a group of village women is taking an interest in conserving mangrove forests. (A women's revolution is on; Conservation and development of mangrove forests, K. Santhosh, TH.C, 14.04.05, E01c)

The Environment Ministry plans to adopt a "multi-stakeholder" approach to improve private participation to increase forest cover in the country. An inter-ministerial consultation is required with various ministries to iron out issues like the extent of finance that the Government would be willing to extend and the revenue share between the Government and private parties.

While the Ministry is finalising its plans, it would soon seek feedback from various industries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers and other ministries. While the proposal is at a preliminary stage, it may entail changes in the Forest Conservation Act, depending on the finalised plans, said officials. Meanwhile, the country lost 26,245 sq km of dense forests between 2001 and 2003, though the overall forest cover increased by 2,795 sq km. As much as 3,90,564 sq km of the country's geographical area was under dense forest cover, while open forests covered 2,87,769 sq km, according to the 'State of Forest Report—2003' (SFR-2003) released by the Forest Survey of India. A total of 6,78,333 sq km or 20.64 % of area is under forest cover. Asked about the loss in dense forests, Mr Raja attributed it to various industrial, developmental and mining projects being undertaken across the country. The Government rules stipulate that those undertaking such projects have to compensate for the loss of forests by planting trees on double the forest land used for the purpose. (Ministry to adopt 'multi-stakeholder' approach to increase forest cover; To seek feedback from industry, NGOs, BL.B, 20.07.05, E01c)

The Centre recently approved diversion of forest land under Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 to certain government departments for development activities. However, approval will be granted for two years, ending December 31, 2006, and will be subject to review thereafter. Accordingly, relaxation of rules cover activities such as construction of school buildings, dispensary and hospitals, electric and telecommunication lines, drinking water, rainwater harvesting structures, minor irrigation canals, structures of non-conventional sources of energy, putting up skill development and vocational training centres, power substations, communication posts, police stations, outposts, border outposts and watch towers in sensitive areas.

The Centre, in its guidelines, stated that development and conservation should go hand in hand. Awareness, however, among the people is bound to come from within, provided other necessities such as food, clothing, education, health, and communication are satisfied. The Centre is committed to expedite its efforts for development activities in forest areas, covering the tribal people and others living in the forest.

The Centre is ready to tackle the problems of sensitive areas on the socio-economic front. It is set to facilitate special execution of essential development activities. But, the Government wants to ensure a balance between economic and development considerations on one hand and ecological considerations on the other. It is imperative that for creation of these facilities in forest and its fringe areas, most of the land

requirement will have to be met from forest land. The general approval of the Centre is bound by certain conditions. Forest land diverted for specific development works should be less than one hectare in each case and clearance from the Centre is subject to the condition that it is need based. (Forest Act relaxed for development, Jeevan Chinnappa, TH.B, 28.08.05, E01c)

E01d Wildlife

Stunned by the fate of tigers at Sariska in Rajasthan, Forest officials at Bandipur are on an alert and will strengthen the anti-poaching camps to deal with the crisis plaguing the striped beauty which is tottering on the brink of extinction. Strengthening such camps is now perceived to be an area of priority ever since the country was hit by the tragedy at Sariska where poachers wiped away the magnificent creatures forcing the Prime Minister to express concern over the fate of wildlife and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) stepped in for investigation. There are 31 anti-poaching camps in the Bandipur National Park and 24 in Nagarahole. The authorities have sought permission to create 30 more camps for the forest protection work. However, some non-governmental organisations working on conservation issue say that strengthening the anti-poaching camps is a welcome development, but the Department of Forests should take care of the personnel posted to such camps. The average age of a forest guard is reckoned to be 50 with majority of them suffering from hypertension or diabetes, and thus unfit for the rigours of the forest protection task. (Forest staff gear up to prevent a Sariska in Bandipur, Krishna Kumar, TH.B, 02.04.05, E01d)

All may not be well with the tigers, but there is good news for animal lovers from Gir, the only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion in the world. According to a lion census carried out at Sasan Gir in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, the lion population in the national park has climbed to 359 compared to 327 in 2001. The Gir National Park is, in fact, overflowing and the lions have spilled over to adjoining areas. A few years ago, a pride of lions had moved to the coast near Veraval, a town about 35 km from Sasan Gir. That was the first time the lion was found to be adapting itself to a coastal environment. Gujarat is, however, still not willing to relocate the lions in any other part of the country. Wildlife experts have been demanding that the lion population should be spread out to improve its survival, in case an epidemic strikes Gir. Madhya Pradesh has been requesting that some lions be moved to its forests. (Will Gujarat's 'pride' hurt Gir? Gaurav Raghuvanshi, BL.B, 01.05.05, E01d)

Years before saving the tiger became a raging national concern, one man had made it his sole mission. He devoted his entire life to saving India's big cat, which way back in the 70s did not face the kind of threat it faces today. That man is Billy Arjan Singh, India's original 'tiger man'. He chose to set up home on the edge of the Dudhwa National Park in UP so that he could protect the tiger and leopards in the forest. Now as the 88-year-old looks back, he feels he was successful despite being a persona non-gratis for the government and the local goons. He claims there are not more than 20-25 tigers today in Dudhwa and they survived chiefly because the Park is the only one boasting of bio-diversity.

That apart, there isn't much about the state of tigers in India that Singh feels cheerful about. Even the recent appointment of the Tiger Task Force by the Prime Minister is not music to his ears. "The wrong person is heading it. Sunita Narain calls herself an environmentalist, which I feel is a mix of one or another. And as such, one is not giving priority to the cause. They should have appointed someone like Ullas Karat or Valmik Thapar" he says. (Wrong person is heading tiger panel: Billy Arjan Singh, Meenakshi Kumar, TOI.M, 15.08.05, E01d)

The tussle between the Tatas and the turtles has taken a new twist with the recent assertion from Tata Steel officials that Dhamra Port Company Ltd (Tata Steel -L&T JV) would go ahead with the port at Dhamra, Orissa even before the environmental study is over.

The environmental assessment of the port assumes critical importance as it is located in the immediate vicinity of this fragile zone of Olive Ridley sea turtles and any such activity poses a threat to this rare species.

The environmental study for the proposed port, which is currently being carried out by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and other NGOs, is not expected to get over by April-May, 2006. Tata Steel has stated that the work on the project would commence by January 2006. In response to an email query Tata

Steel officials stated, Tata Steel and L&T are not the type of companies who would go ahead with a project against the interest of environment and ecology in this case the habitat of the turtles.

However, according to another study carried by out Wildlife Institute of India via satellite, all the sample turtles have a tendency to move towards the north of Dhamra. Four turtles were tagged with satellite chips and their movements were monitored via satellite. The report of the Central Empowered Committee, appointed by the Supreme Court, had earlier suggested the port needs to be re-located as it threatens the existence of Olive Ridley turtles. (Tatas' tussle with turtles takes new twist, Proposed Port Company Poses Risk to Olive Ridley Turtles, Manojit Saha, FE.D, 29.09.05, E01d)

The Forest Department has decided to engage 1200 elephants for promoting nature tourism in national parks in Assam. The Forest Minister, Pradvut Bordoloi, said that the Government would organise elephant festivals to sensitise people about co-existing with the pachyderms to minimise the growing man-elephant conflict. The destruction of elephant habitats has led to this conflict. Using the elephants for promoting tourism would help their owners to generate the income required for maintaining them. The Forest Department had engaged elephants owned by individuals in the recently held Kaziranga National Park centenary celebrations and also arranged for their health check-up. Mr. Bordoloi said that an elephant village would be set up by the Department in collaboration with tour operators at Rani on the outskirts of the city. (Elephants to promote nature tourism, Sushanta Talukdar, TH.B, 20.02.06, E01d)

E12 Natural and Common Resources

A Congress MLA is among six landowners who have encroached on various stretches of Juhu beach. The encroachments on the beach, which extends from Juhu Koliwada in the south to Moragaon near Versova, came to light last month when suburban deputy resident collector G M Bodke filed an affidavit in the High Court listing out the powerful people and establishments that have grabbed expensive pieces of Juhu's real estate.

The affidavit was filed as part of the ongoing public interest litigation demanding the implementation of the Juhu beautification scheme and shows a map indicating that Congress MLA from Shirpur in district Dhule, Amrish Patel's family which owns plot no. 17 at Juhu beach, has encroached on a section of the beach. According to the list submitted, a cluster of five bungalows owned by Juhu Property Pvt Ltd has usurped a whopping 46,000 sq mts on the northern end of the beach. Hotel Horizon has encroached upon 900 sq mts of the beach. (Cong MLA, hotel among encroachers at Juhu beach; Juhu Property Pvt Ltd usurped a whopping 46,000 sqm, Clara Lewis, TOI.M, 02.05.05, E12)

Multinationals for rural water supply



We may have to pay a price even for drawing water from ponds and borewells! (S V Padmanabha, VT.B, 10.05.05, E12)

Medha Patkar crushed a bottle of packaged drinking water to symbolically launch the campaign against privatisation of water supply. Environmentalist and social activist Medha Patkar was to launch the Karnataka leg of the nationwide campaign spearheaded by the National Alliance of People's Movement. Ms. Patkar

alleged that the state governments are being pressured by multinational companies and the World Bank to privatise water supply in one form or the other and the increased marketing of bottled water is the evidence of this. C. Balakrishnan, convenor of the alliance, said: "Many of these bottles are filled with contaminated water resulting in health hazards. The poor are denied their right under the Constitution to free supply of safe drinking water. "Ground water is fast getting depleted, and the lack of state initiative and public investments to collect and preserve rainwater is adding to an unprecedented water crisis in many parts of the country." (Campaign against privatisation of water supply launched, TH.B, 25.10.05, E12)

Many are toying with the idea of commercialising water. The World Bank has been vigorously campaigning since the 1990s and they have made inroads in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and also Delhi. Bangalore is not far behind. They have already identified the soft targets and are slowly unleashing the plan. Hence the protest of civil society organisations to thwart this attempt in Bangalore recently is not without reason. Fresh water is a scarce resource. Only 0.008 % of the planets' water is available for human consumption. A city of one million uses approximately 625,000 metric tons of water everyday. Pollution of rivers and oceans is increasing. It is easy to take clean water and regular access for granted in the developed nations.

Water privatisation exacerbates the existing global inequality of access to water. Countries that are now suffering severe water short ages are home to the poorest people on earth. To charge them for already scarce supplies is to guarantee growing water disparities. Hundreds of thousands of Bolivians came into the streets to protest when Bechtel, backed by the World Bank, doubled water rates.

Every article on the subject of water starts with the reminder of the population explosion and where it is occurring. Implying that "these people" are responsible for the looming water crisis. But a mere 12 % of the world's population uses 85 % of its water, and these 12 % do not live in the Third World.

The privatisation of this scarce resource will lead to a two-tier, those who can afford water and those who cannot. It will force millions to choose between necessities such as water and health care. In England, high water rates force people to choose whether or not to wash their food, flush their toilets, or even bathe. Water as a fundamental human right is guaranteed in the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. (Privatising water is to hit the poor where it hurts most, Somasekhar V K, VT.B, 03.12.05, E12)

E20 Tourism and Crime

A 47-year-old German tourist was allegedly raped by an auto-rickshaw driver and his accomplice in Jodhpur. The two were arrested a few hours later by the city police. The tourist, an employee of Lufthansa Airlines, was raped on the outskirts of the city after the two abducted her from the heart of Jodhpur. The victim's screams woke up people in a nearby hamlet, who came to the tourist's rescue. By then the accused had fled from the scene. Nearly three hours later, the auto driver Shankar Lal was intercepted by the police and arrested. (German tourist raped in Jodhpur, IE.C, 13.05.05, E20)

Taking serious view of the rape of a German tourist, the Rajasthan High Court has directed the lower court to complete the hearing within a month. The Court observed that this case was very serious as it could tarnish the image of the country and also create a sense of fear amongst foreign tourists. The Court made the published reports in newspapers as base and issued notices to Home Secretary of the state, Director of Tourism Department and SP of Jodhpur to present their answers before the Court within a week. This, perhaps, is the first of its kind of PIL in the history of judiciary where, the High Court has directly - issued notices to the government agencies and directives for the lower court.

Meanwhile the tourist had shown her gratitude towards the villagers of Basni Veda who came to her rescue and Jodhpur police. (Jodhpur rape case: HC tells lower court to speed up, TOI.D, 15.05.05, E20)

A large number of craft emporiums in the city of Taj are known to cheat tourists through credit card frauds. Taking serious note of the large number of incidents in which tourists were cheated in Agra, Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chowdhary has asked the local India Tourism office to co-ordinate with the Agra authorities and UP Tourism Department to check credit card scams that are giving a bad name to the country's tourism industry.

Tourist Information Officer Mr Lalta Prasad said he has recently received a letter from an American tourist, who had been defrauded of Rs 28,000 by an Agra jewellery shop. The complaint that was filed by the tourist through her embassy had been forwarded to the Agra office of India Tourism by Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chowdhary, seeking immediate action.

Mr Prasad said Rachel Calderon, a resident of Los Angeles, United States, has complained that she had arrived in Agra on November 11 last year and immediately after arriving to the city was taken to Hamling Collections, a jewellery shop in Sadar Bazar area of the town by a local tout.

She purchased jewellery worth \$ 70 but when she returned to US after a few weeks, she found that instead of \$ 70, she had been charged \$ 700 for the jewellery following which she filed a complaint with the US embassy.

Mr Prasad said such cases of credit card frauds with foreign tourists are not new in Agra and each year, the India Tourism office receives several complaints from tourists against a select few emporiums, whose names recur in the complaints.

Now, acting upon this complaint forwarded recently by the Union Tourism Minister, the India Tourism office has asked the Agra Senior Superintendent of Police Rajiv Krishna, District Magistrate Sanjay Prasad & Joint Director UP Tourism, D K Burman to investigate the role of Agra emporiums in cheating tourists.

He recommends that the tourists should make cash payments after making purchases from Agra emporiums and if at all credit cards are used for the purchases, they should insist on the use of an electronic card verification machine instead of a manual process as the electronic method is fool-proof to a large extent. In manual method, there are chances that the charge slips might be altered by the emporium owner after the tourist signed it. (Credit card scams abound in city of Taj, Vijay Upadhyay, T.P.D, 19.05.05, E20)

Worried that rising cases of rape and molestation in Delhi may affect the tourism sector, Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chaudhury called police Chief K.K. Paul to express concern and sought remedial steps. The Police Commissioner had a 15-minute-long meeting with the Minister during which they discussed ways to increase safety for women in the city. The meeting comes a day after a woman was raped at the Safdarjung Hospital and close on the heels of the molestation of a young woman who had come with her family to have dinner in Connaught Place. She said she had suggested that the tourist police force be converted into a dedicated force and offered her Ministry's assistance to "sensitise" it. However the Minister said the police alone could not be expected to curb such cases and common people should also be sensitised so that offenders were socially ostracised. (Incidents harming tourism, Paul told, HT.D, 16.09.05, E20)

Displaying commendable speed, a Jaipur sessions court and the Rajasthan police have combined to ensure that a local rickshaw puller was handed a court sentence within 36 hours of molesting a foreign tourist. This is the fourth time that offenders have been brought to justice speedily in Rajasthan. The Vidhayak Puri police station here - only the second in the country to have ISO 9000 certification - received a complaint from a tourist that she had been molested by a rickshaw puller while looking for a hotel. Police identified the rickshaw puller, Vijay Das, within two hours and over the next few hours approached the court with a charge sheet. On the police's request, the court began the trial immediately and heard out some witnesses - interestingly three foreign tourists deposed as witnesses. The trial resumed and the court announced its judgment by evening, handing Das a six months' jail term and a Rs 500 fine. The court said it was imperative to hand out punishment quickly in such cases as the country's reputation was at stake. (Jail term in two days for teasing tourist, Sandipan Sharma, IE.C, 27.11.05, E20)

E21 Tourist Police and Security

Security agencies at the Taj Mahal were again faced embarrassment when a Korean tourist group staged a song and dance show inside the monument. It was even recorded on a video.

Reacting late, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), in-charge of the monuments security, managed to confiscate the video camera of the tourists and the tape was destroyed before allowing the tourists to leave the monument premises. This group, being part of a cultural troupe of Korea visiting the town, was allowed to

enter the monument after a perfunctory security check. The tourists proceeded towards the central tank of the monument and assembled on the tank in the form of a choir and began a song and dance sequence on the platform that was being filmed by one of the tourists from the group, said the Deputy Commandant.

According to Ms Singh, the guards immediately captured the camera being used by the tourists and told them that they had violated the rules of the monument that prohibited video-shoots from the central tank. The tourists feigned ignorance of the rules and said that their local guide had told them it was ok to shoot the music video at the monument.

She said that after interrogating the tourists, it was ascertained that they had indeed made a mistake, being misguided by the local guide and they were allowed to complete their tour of the monument, though their video camera was confiscated till they returned from their tour. The camera was later handed back to them, though the tape was destroyed. (Tourists make mockery of Taj security, Vijay Upadhyay, TPD, 17.02.06, E21)

E22 Tourism and Drugs

A city court has refused the bail application of an Israeli national accused of international drug trafficking and money laundering worth 10 million Euros, equivalent to Rs 50 crore.

Indian immigration authorities apprehended Elisha, wanted in the Netherlands for over two years, in February, pursuant to a lookout notice run by the Interpol. According to the warrant, Elisha is guilty of involvement in criminal drug trafficking activities and laundering money from criminal origin in Holland and New Zealand. (No to bail for foreign drug peddler, TPD, 12.03.06, E22)

E40 Sex-Tourism

A high-profile prostitution racket was unearthed by the Delhi police and two women, including a Bollywood starlet, and an alleged pimp were arrested. The alleged pimp was a close associate of Delhi's "flesh trade king" Kamaljit Singh. Vimal Thapa and the two women were held by the police after a raid on a star hotel in South Delhi. Their network was spread over Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Uttaranchal and other states. (Sex racket busted at a posh hotel, AA.D, 03.10.05, E40)

Thomas Cook is running family tours of Amsterdam's red light district. Thomas Cook claims the tour, offers a fascinating insight into the oldest profession in the world. But family campaigners and MP' condemned the company for offering the Walking Tour- Dark Amsterdam. The outing includes a briefing on the haunt by a former prostitute and a guided tour. It's simply not good enough every decent parent and family will be appalled that tours of this nature are being offered not only to adults but also to impressionable children. Thomas Cook claims it offers the tour in its 2006 Signature Cities and Short Breaks brochure specialist arm of the main firm in response to feedback from clients. A press release on the two-hour tour says it leaves at 8pm and will take visitors deep into the famous red-light district, accompanied by a reliable and trustworthy guide. (Travel Co offers family tour of Amsterdam's red-light district, Beth Hale, TOI.B, 17.11.05, E40)

E41 Prostitution and Trafficking

The agents involved in flesh trade are transporting bar girls of Mumbai to various places of western Uttar Pradesh (UP). They are looking for new faces. Some agents have even finalised the deal. After Maharashtra Government's decision to close its numerous dance bars, many bar girls have lost their jobs. The state has about 1 500 dance bars employing more than 100,000 women who mostly dance Bollywood numbers. Unemployed, the bar girls have started moving to other Indian cities to eke out their living. Some of them have shifted to Meerut. The local agents have their network spawned in smaller cities — Muzaffarnagar, Bijnore, Baghpat and Sharanpur. (Western UP: New destination for Maha bar girls, Alok Sharma, TPD, 07.05.05, E41)

The jobless women of Mumbai's dance bars may turn their ire towards the US Consulate since Washington supports the closure of the infamous 'dance bars'. An official report released by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice applauds the Maharashtra Home Minister's order to close down dance bars. "Many of these served as

prostitution and trafficking outlets.” the state department report said. The US hopes that the closure of dance bars may check a new trend of traffickers favouring this “more sophisticated and concealed format for selling victims trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation over more blatant brothel-based trafficking”.

The annual exercise of tracking human trafficking throughout the work does not go into social and economic reasons for this global malady but US researchers are well informed about the red light districts in far away Mumbai.

The report does not explain the reasons for the shift away from brothel-based trafficking to high-class prostitution. Reports from India often suggest that economic liberalisation and increased business travel are partly responsible for expensive five-star prostitution.

India is also a growing destination for sex tourists from Europe, the US and other Western countries, the report note studies show that majority females in the Indian commercial sex industry are currently victims of sexual servitude. (Trafficking: India under US' watchful eye, L K Sharma, DH.B, 05.06.05, E41)

Warning that trafficking in human beings has become an organised transnational crime generating profits of more than \$ 8-10 billion a year, chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Justice A.S. Anand said there were enormous gaps in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act that need to be addressed.

Delivering the keynote address at a seminar on Trafficking in Human Beings, he said that instead of prosecuting the traffickers under Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 of ITPA, most prosecutions take place under Section 8, victimising trafficked persons.

Noting that efforts to combat trafficking have resulted in justifying repressive measures against victims of sexual exploitation in the name of their protection, he said anti-trafficking measures must take into account the role of traffickers and steps to protect the rights of the sexually exploited. (Call for changes in law on human trafficking, TH.B, 29.10.05, E41)

Now, if a woman checks into any hotel in New Delhi without luggage, she will be noticed by the police. According to the police in the New Delhi area, the hotels in the area are frequented by prostitutes, who check into rooms without any luggage. Deputy Commissioner of police (New Delhi) Anita Roy said that this is the only way to bust prostitution rackets running in the area. This new way to curb prostitution will be applicable in all hotels, including the five-star hotels in the city. The police have also said that all hotels in New Delhi have been given instructions to inform the police about women checking in without baggage. However, the police is yet to bust any prostitution racket and although the hotels are cooperating with the police, many have filed counter-complaints against the police. (Cops to check 5-star hotel 'guests', Syed Asim Ali, AA.D, 29.10.05, E41)

E42 Child Prostitution / Child Sex Abuse

It is the educated, high profile and hep citizens of Bangalore who are the worst child abusers.

The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) rescues at least 12 children from Bangalore homes every week from domestic abuse and majority of the employers are government officials, top officials in multi-national companies, priests and even doctors.

Statistics

- ◆ During the last eight months, the committee has received 80 cases of child labour, 75 of which were children employed as domestic workers. Of this, 95 % were below the age of 14 years.
- ◆ Of the 80 cases, 60 were girls and 20 were boys.
- ◆ 13 cases of children who were severely abused have been referred by the committee to the labour court.

(Educated elite top the child abusers' list, Seethalakshmi S, TOI.B, 11.07.05, E42)

The Supreme Court cancelled the bail of Swiss paedophile couple Wilhelm (62) and Lile Marti (60) — convicted in March 2003 by a Mumbai Sessions Court — and asked the Maharashtra police to issue a non-bailable warrant against them, and get the Centre's help on extraditing them. The court was hearing a special petition moved by Maharashtra following reports in "Express" on April 2 and 3 that the Swiss couple — nabbed in a suburban hotel abusing minor street girls — fled the country in November 2004, their passports still in a local court's possession. Their escape was in direct violation of a Supreme Court order that had granted them bail in April 2004 but barred them from leaving the country. (Supreme Court cancel bail of Swiss paedophiles, Get Centre's help for extradition, police told, Chitragada Choudhury, I.E.C, 17.08.05, E42)

It is imperative that the present provisions under the criminal law, dealing with child sex abuse and exploitation, are amended and special courts established to deal with such cases, said A P Shah, Chief Justice of Madras High Court.

He suggested that a joint investigating team comprising a police officer, a physician and a psychiatrist be formed to deal with child abuse cases. Stating that child abuse had assumed monstrous proportions, he said that children were being traded like a commodity the world over. Millions of girls and boys are being used in flesh trade, pornography and other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, he said, adding that sexual exploitation of children had become a multi-billion dollar industry of international dimensions.

However, reports of crimes against children, Shah said, "are on the increase in the country." He added that it was a matter of concern that 20 percent of the victims of rape were children and that the relevant provisions in the IPC were inadequate to deal with the cases of personal violence against children. (Amend law to tackle child sex abuse: CJ, I.E.C, 17.2.06, E42)

E61 Women Workers in Tourism

A recent World Economic Forum study on gender gap has ranked India 53 among 58 countries in terms of the status of women in society. Pakistan at 56 and Brazil at 51 gave India company. Sweden ranked first while France stood at 13, a step ahead of the US (17).

What places India in such a dismal position? According to the WEF, achieving gender equality is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes. The study which compared the global gender gap across five parameters — economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and well-being — gave India a score of 3.27 in a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing maximum gender equality.

Although the Indian Constitution ensures equal rights for women in the workforce, with equal pay for equal work, the ground realities are very different. Across the country, women are paid lower wages than men in the formal sector, and in the organised sector, women are mainly confined to certain types of work which call for repetitive tasks, sitting at one place for long hours, or so-called softer options like teaching or nursing. For those women who have the courage to breach the invisible barriers and take up 'a man's job which would require more decision-making or networking, the glass ceiling prevents them from reaching the pinnacles of power.

Employment of women in the organised public and private sector has gone up which is evident for the fact that in 1990, there were 227.09 lakh males and 36.49 lakh females, out of a total workforce of 263.53 lakh. In 2002, the employment of males went down to 222.7lakh and female employment rose to 49.35 lakh in a total workforce of 272.06 lakh, according to the Economic Survey 2003-04.

The hospitality sector is another example. Hotels have traditionally been a major employer of women, but these also give the opportunity to women to climb the corporate ladder. According to ITC Hotels, 45% of their employees across different properties are women. "We have women employees at the top rungs too. Our corporate policies encourage more women to apply and try for the top posts," says a company official. (Working women get a raw deal, Banashree Purkayastha, F.E.B, 29.05.05, E61)

Thanks to the current boom in the aviation industry, allied sectors like hospitality and restaurants are experiencing a surge, leading to a sudden rise in demand for well-groomed hostesses. Hospitality sources

say that most of these women are being hired for guest relations and sales executives. And finishing schools like Airhostess Academy and the Elite Model Management School, which offer a range of personality development and visual grooming programs, are flooded with offers from the hotel sector.

While the Elite Model School maintains that they do not send out their models for hotel assignments, a company source said that young girls from the grooming and placement programmes are being “accommodated” in lifestyle-related jobs such as high-end retail stores and five-star restaurants. However, many in the restaurant business believe that looks are not the sole criteria and skills are as important. (Models for Hotels, Namita Kohli, IE.D, 06.10.05, E61)

Even as the Centre proposes policies to downsize the bureaucracy, the latter finds ways of springing back in full force. This time, the bureaucracy has found ways of employing “idle wives” of service officers going by the scheme to be launched by the Tourism Ministry.

Project Priyadarshini, an initiative of the Tourism Ministry, is an endeavour to bring women into the core area of the service sector, and take advantage of the tourism boom in the country.

Addressing a press conference, Tourism Secretary A K Mishra outlined the projects where women could be employed from driving taxis to running a taxi service, restaurants, information and facilitation kiosks, cafeterias. Mishra said the Tourism Ministry would welcome wives of service officers with special skills like knowledge of foreign languages to act as “premium guides.” So even as the ministry’s training programme for tourist guides languishes, it has decided to co-opt women to act as special guides for high-end visitors “for tours as well as shopping”. With Project Priyadarshini, the Tourism Ministry will also facilitate self-employment for women under various schemes of the Ministry of Urban Development and also Poverty Alleviation. (Idle wives as guides, vrinda Gopinath, IE.C, 09.12.05, E61)

Yet another male bastion is all set to crumble. Air India (AI), which so far had only male in-flight supervisors, will now allow female crew members to take up what till now was an exclusive male domain. The order allowing female crew members to be considered for the post of in-flight supervisor was signed by the Chairman and Managing Director, Mr V. Thulasidas.

An in-flight supervisor is a person to whom all the crew of the aircraft report. Generally, cabin crew who have put in 25-30 years of service are considered for the post of in-flight supervisor. Indian Airlines already follows this system and has female in-flight supervisors. (Female in-flight supervisors to make debut on Air India, Ashwini Phadnis, BL.B, 29.12.05, E61)

Ushering in a major change in the Capital’s hospitality industry lifted the restriction on women serving liquor at public places. Delivering the order, which also applies to men under 25, a division Bench set aside curbs imposed by the Punjab Excise Act, 1914, which is applicable in Delhi. “We declare that Section 30 of the Punjab Excise Act, 1914 is violative of Article 19 (1)(G) 14 and 15 and unconstitutional and inoperative to the extent that it imposes restrictions upon the employment of women in any part of the licensed premises in which liquor or intoxicating drugs are consumed by the public,” the Bench ruled.

The court, however, made it clear that ‘no women employee would be compelled to serve in a bar in case she has objections in doing so.’

Allowing the petition filed by three hotel management graduates, along with the Hotel Association of India, the Bench termed Section 30 as an “antithesis to the contemporary era”.

On the rising popularity of the hospitality industry as a career choice among women, the court said, “Increasing numbers of female candidates appear and pass in the entrance examinations conducted for admissions to various hotel management courses. Equal number of female and male candidates can be found in class rooms of a reputed institution offering courses in Hotel Management. This shows the enthusiasm of women to take on any challenge shown up by the hotel industry”. (Women can serve liquor in hotels: HC, Tanu Sharma, IE.B, 13.01.06, E61)

E63 Women Tourist

Keeping in mind the two things that women travellers look for most safety and privacy, these new all-women rooms will have female staff and special services for women.

ITC Grand Central Sheraton in Mumbai, for instance, has introduced 15 exclusive rooms for women. The Oberoi group and the Bharat Hotels are conducting a feasibility study, while The Leela group will also introduce a women only floor' in its new Chennai property and other forthcoming projects. Hotels that do not offer these floors are making up with extra attention in terms of safety and additional amenities for luxury and comfort. These rooms are stocked with an array of up-market amenities catering to the needs of the busy woman. Beyond special care and attention, the amenities provided are privacy-and-safety-focussed security systems, like door video phone, separate lifts, in-room check-in, and workout stepper, value additions at Spa services like massages, facials, manicures, and body treatments besides separate room service menu. The other amenities include full-length mirrors, magnifying two-sided round makeup mirrors, up-market bathroom toiletries besides soft colour scheme in the rooms with special bathroom lighting. Guests on these floors are served by female staff. The price tag for such premium rooms range between Rs 7,000-8,000 per night. (Hotels dress up for fairer sex, Rumi Dutta Hardasmalani, TOI.D, 17.05.05, E63)

E71 National Parks and Sanctuaries

At dusk, the State Transport bus disgorges people returning from work in Khatkali village in the Melghat Tiger Reserve. 'We go everywhere looking for work,' says Gamba Belsare.

Every year, with dwindling jobs, the people of Khatkali clear forestland and plant some crops. Very few have land rights.

Near the core area: Living in the forest has problems too. People have to stay up all night to ensure that animals do not destroy their crops. If clearing forests is an issue in Khatkali, then in Dhargad it is the poisoning of deer. This village has been settled since 1964 and it is near the core area of the Reserve. "The Forest Department gave us land and built homes for us to stay here and look after the forest. They also gave us work. But after this tiger project, there is nothing for us. We have to steal firewood and clear land for agriculture. We are treated unjustly," says Pundalik Baliram Godmale.

The people feel they have bigger problems. They don't understand why the Forest Department does not permit the killing of wild boar, which destroys their crops. Both Khatkali and Dhargad are part of the 19 villages, which are to be relocated from the Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra's Amravati district. Three villages have already been moved out and there are mixed reactions among the relocated people.

In Dhargad they have already been shown land, which people have approved. "We are quite keen on leaving the forest. The Forest Department suspects us of killing animals. Now they even have military men to keep vigil on us," said Godmale. However, Vatsala Deokar fears that if they leave the forest, they may have to pay for many things they now take for granted.

Reserve is understaffed: The Reserve, which has about 70 tigers, is under staffed with 206 guards and 72 foresters against a sanctioned strength of 600. Of late the prey base is the increasing target. One of the first nine Tiger Reserves included in Project Tiger in 1973, the 1,676 sq. km. Reserve comprises the Gughamal National Park, which is the core area, the Melghat Tiger Sanctuary and a denotified area of 500 sq km area called the multiple use area. (Uneasy existence, Meena Menon, TH.D, 11.09.05, E71)

■ G – COASTAL REGIONS ■

G10 Marine and CRZ Acts, Rules and Laws

The national maritime policy is yet to be finalised, even though it was framed in August 2004. In fact the policy was pasted on the website of the Ministry of Shipping, Roads and Highways and after incorporating the inputs from various stakeholders a modified draft was again put up on the site in February 2005. However ministry officials say that opinions are still being sought on the policy, and soon it would be ready in its entirety. Once the ministry prepares a final draft, it would be sent for the Cabinet's clearance. However, there seems to be no clear reason, as to why the policy has not been fine-tuned. The maritime policy is being considered as a significant step towards providing better coordination with other modes of transport and also assisting in the development of shipping and port infrastructure. (National maritime policy yet to find an anchor, Animesh Singh, FE.B, 03.01.06, G10)

The Ministry of Environment and Forests will shortly put in place a Coastal Zone Management Plan. It will replace the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ).

The new plan, which will take effect in a few months, will be based on the concept of vulnerability line. Vulnerability line will be the setback line demarcated along the coast. It will be based on the hazard assessment of each coastal area. The Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad, will be the nodal agency for mapping this line. The map and data would be in the public domain once it is cleared by the Ministry of Defence and suitable amendments were made to the legislation.

The Ministry set up the Swaminathan Committee in 2004 to review the CRZ and the report was submitted in February 2005, 'the committee feels that the current practice of fixing CRZ based on high tide line is not the best of practices and is less scientific. It has also widened the scope of definition of a coastal zone.

The coastal zone is to now include "an area from territorial limits (12 nautical miles), including its sea-bed to the administrative boundaries or the biological boundaries demarcated on the landward side of the sea coast. The coastal zone management will also "include the inland tidal water bodies influenced by tidal action and the land area along such water bodies." Most of the committee recommendations have been accepted. The Ministry has had consultations with the Survey of India and other organisations to finalise the vulnerability line.

Seven parameters: The Committee has recommended seven parameters for mapping the vulnerability line and has issued guidelines for this. The parameters are elevation, geology, geomorphology, sea level trends, horizontal shoreline displacement, tidal ranges and wave heights.

Unlike the CRZ, the plan will be oriented towards managing resources, development and regulation. The Committee has proposed 4 Coastal Management Zones (CMZ). CMZ I would consist of areas designated as ecologically sensitive. CMZ II would include areas identified as Areas of Particular Concern such as economically important areas, high population areas and culturally/strategically important areas. CMZ-III would include of all other open areas, including the coastal areas, excluding those areas classified as CMZ-I, CMZ-III and CMZ-IV. CMZ-IV pertains to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. (Coastal Zone Management Plan to replace CRZ, A Srivathsan, TH.B, 12.03.06, G10)

G30m Tamil Nadu

Even though the Government has ordered people living along the tsunami-affected coast to build houses 200 metres away from the ocean, fishermen are still staying close to the sea. They say that they do not have an option as their livelihood is at risk.

The Government Order No. 172 lucidly provides guidelines for constructing houses. The GO states that according to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notifications, fully damaged houses within 200 metres of the high tide line will have to be constructed beyond the 200-metre zone. If not the Government will not provide any assistance.

Several people whose livelihood depends on the sea express serious displeasure against the GO. "We do not fear the onset of another tsunami. We need to stay near the ocean, because even the change in the colour of the sea or the nature of the wind along the coastline helps us identify what sort of fish we will catch that day. (Fishermen say they can't help GO violation, Tamil Nadu Govt has plans of expanding the fisheries sector, Anupama Jayaraman, I.E.B, 06.10.05, G30m)

G43 Ports

The Orissa government has decided to handover the loss-making Gopalpur fair-weather port to Orissa Stevedores Limited (OSL) for its development. The decision to privatise the Gopalpur port was taken at a cabinet sub-committee on infrastructure development chaired by Chief Minister Navin Patnaik. As per the decision, OSL would invest nearly Rs 750 crores in two phases for the development of the port under built, operate, own, share and transfer (BOOST) basis. (OSL to develop Gopalpur port, Akshaya Kumar Sahoo, AA.B, 27.02.06, G43)

■ H – HILL AND MOUNTAIN REGIONS ■

H10 Hill Tourism

As temperatures in the plains are heading skywards, there's only one place that people are heading to beat the heat — hills. But there's a slight difference this time. While Ooty, Kodaikanal and Munnar are still hot favourites, their appeal has been declining with commercialisation and large crowds. Instead, travellers are exploring some of the state's own nature destinations. Some of them are still unexplored and most of them do not have many tourists so people seem to prefer them.

According to industry sources, though high-end travellers prefer to go out of the country during the summer vacation, a host of other domestic travellers, especially from North India, choose to come down South. For Bangaloreans, Nandi hills continue to be a favourite week-end destination, despite the bad facilities. For longer holidays, it's either Kodagu or Chikmagalur are the preferred destinations, followed by the Western ghats. (Ooty, Kodai passé, state's hills beckon tourists, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 19.05.05, H10)

H20 Nilgiris

The ancient and picturesque Nilgiri hills here have come alive to the sounds thousands of merry making tourists. But can its fragile ecosystem bear the brunt? That is the question environmentalists were asking as a summer fest kicked off in this hill resort and was officially expected to attract 1.5 million visitors. The number is more than double the 700,000 population in the entire Nilgiris district, extending across 3,000 sq km. This year especially due to the December 26 tsunami, people have chosen to stay away from the coast and the Nilgiri resorts are overflowing. (Can Nilgiris bear brunt of tourism? Papri Sri Raman, AA.D, 16.05.05, H20)

Why and how should hill stations/areas like the Nilgiris be developed and for whom? These seemingly rhetorical, but vital and relevant, questions came up for lively deliberations at a recent seminar on "Planning for Development with Conservation in Hill Stations/Areas: A Case Study of Nilgiris" sponsored by the Union Planning Commission and organised by Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC) at Udthagamandalam. The seminar conveyed a simple message — Mountain areas are different from the plains and, therefore, deserve to be treated differently; otherwise disaster, which will affect the plains also, is bound to follow.

Inclusive planning: Dr. Jakka Parthasarathy, Director, Tribal Research Centre, Udthagamandalam, said that while tribals in the Nilgiris had access to modern housing, education and loans from banks, they still faced problems like land alienation, indebtedness, deprivation of rights over forest produce, and lack of basic amenities like drinking water, electricity and health facilities.

Suggesting "sustainable livelihood" for inclusive planning, M.K. Prasad, Co-ordinator of Environment Centre, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), said this concept is an advance from "sustainable development".

Link with plains

"Hill areas, catchments areas, water storage and retention areas and the watershed areas of plains associated with hill stations all need to be viewed as one contiguous feature for holistic planning," she argued. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the extent of the area impacted by the hills, and plans for hill stations must be drawn up keeping in mind this interconnectedness.

Sociologist Siddhartha Krishnan, however, called for a speedy solution to the long-pending Janmam land/forests disputes in the Gudalur area keeping in mind the aspirations of the encroachers/farmers involved and the concerns of conservation.

"The real problem in the Nilgiris lies in 40 % of the area, of which 90 % is occupied by the tea industry, now in deep crisis," said Krishnan. Nilgiris is home to some 65,000 small tea growers. Moreover, almost all belong to the Badaga community, which is the single largest indigenous group in the district

Looming crisis

Dr. Madhu of Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI) warned that another crisis was looming in the tea industry. According to him, while tea is a far better soil binder on the hills compared to vegetables like potato, tea gardens in the district are prone to frequent landslides because of the lack of proper drainage. Inadequate infrastructure, proliferation of slums, inappropriate tourist infrastructure, lack of liquid and solid waste management systems, lack of coordination and conflicting interest of government agencies plague the district even after 140 years of administration. A zero-tolerance approach to untreated waste and non-biodegradable materials will ensure the protection of fragile ecosystems like the Nilgiris, added Tara Murali. Most speakers cited the recent successful ban on harmful plastic bags in the district.

Tourism

Stating that a district so dependent on tourism does not have any idea about how to promote it, Dr. Razak called for a Tourism Development Plan so that the tourism potential of the district can be tapped profitably in consonance with the needs of the environment.

Said Tara Murali, "The daytourist is often a person seeking amusement and who contributes little to the local economy... he is also a major polluter because of the number of buses and other motorised vehicles that come up the hills. Tourism facilities available in hill areas must be restricted to those conforming to eco-tourism and for the discerning eco-tourist."

Dr. Sathyanarayanan of the Anthropological Survey of India, however, cautioned that eco-tourism could not succeed without local participation. Citing the exploitation of the Todas in the name of cultural tourism, he said, "Great interference and cultural injury have been caused to their privacy." (Nilgiris: An action plan to save the hills, Dharmalingam Venugopal, TH.B, 02.10.05, H20)

H30 Himalayas

A group of Asian and European mountaineers will climb Mount Everest this spring to clean up tonnes of garbage left on slopes of the world's highest mountain. The mountaineers from South Korea, Japan, France, Italy and Austria, helped by Nepalese Sherpa guides, plan to begin their mission in April, during the popular spring climbing season.

The team plans to climb to the South Cot at 8,000 meters, the last camp before the push to the 8,850 summit. Although estimates vary, some say there are 50 tonnes of trash on the Nepalese side of the mountain. The team members are all volunteers who will be financing their own trips. (Cleaning up Mount Everest, BL.B, 06.03.06, H30)

They trekked through the Himalayas for weeks at a time, gathering local lore, surveying the landscape and wildlife and harvesting ornamental touches for their village from artisans in the Kathmandu Valley.

After five trips to China and Nepal, their world started to come alive in the form of Serka Zong, a mythical Nepalese mountain village in the heart of Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom theme park in Florida. Serka Zong is the "preamble" to Animal Kingdom's newest attraction, Expedition Everest, which officially opens on April 7. Visitors stroll through Serka Zong, with its real museum and make-believe Internet cafe and trekking supply store, on their way to a roller coaster ride through the mountain and an encounter with a creature known as the Yeti, the mountain's legendary protector. The settlement is much like a village in Nepal, surrounded by lush greenery, with buildings adorned with wood carvings one would see in the Himalayas. (Himalayas is Disney's newest attraction, BL.B, 19.3.06, H30)

■ K – KARNATAKA ■

K11 Planning

The Karnataka Government will enforce an action plan to check and prevent illegal trafficking in children and women in some parts of the State, the Minister for Women and Child Development, T. Bhagirathi Marualusiddanagouda, told the Legislative Council. The Government has formulated the action plan after holding many workshops on the issue in association with several non-government organisations and with the support of the UNICEF.

The action plan has emphasised the need to constitute watchdog committees at district, taluk and village levels to prevent illegal trafficking in children and women. Besides, the Government in its order on May 30, 2005, has formed watchdog committees to protect and rehabilitate such children and women. It has also constituted a State-level advisory committee. (Action plan against trafficking in children, women ready, TH.B, 19.07.05, K11)

K12 Infrastructure

Amidst the boom in aviation, falling air fares and the airlines' tempting seasonal offers, it looks like the small cities, too, can finally enjoy their place under the sky.

In Karnataka alone, the half-dozen minor airports are set to land investments of Rs 200-250 crore during 2005 and 2006, for either facelift or to build brand new connectivity.

Mangalore's Bajpe is going to be made international class by mid-2006. In Mysore, a new operational runway will give a fresh lease of life to the idling airport, and that should somewhat unshackle it from Bangalore and open up new upcountry links for it. Trading hub Hubli has also got night landing facilities, which could get an air-link with Mumbai or tourist hotspot Goa. At heritage centre Hampi, the State Government is converting Jindal Vijayanagar Steel Ltd's private airport operator's licence into a public one. As a bonus, it recently clinched approvals for two Greenfield projects, at Gulbarga and Hassan. Then there is Belgaum waiting for a facelift; there is also Bijapur. (Aviation boom: Airports in small cities reaping benefits, Madhumati D S, TH.B, 26.08.05, K12)

K34 Bangalore

The Taj Group plans to add two more hotels in Bangalore in the business class and luxury category to increase its room inventory from the current 393. The Tata Group's hospitality arm, which operates three hotels in the business class and luxury segment, plans to set up one at the International Technology Park in Whitefield and another near the proposed Bangalore International Airport at Devanahalli. The Taj Group was also planning to promote Bangalore as a leisure destination, as the city attracts largely business visitors. (Taj group plans 2 more hotels in Bangalore, BL.B, 03.05.05, K34)

The prevailing accommodation crunch in the premium hotel category in Bangalore may soon be a thing of the past. About 3,500 luxury hotel rooms are due to be created over the next two to three years in the city, as some of the biggest global brands are preparing to set up properties here. The city currently has 1,600-odd rooms in the five-star category but these have proved to be totally insufficient. Real estate players have sensed a huge business opportunity in the sector and are building world class properties for international brands. Big players like Shangri-La, Marriott, Hilton, and the Carlson Group (with the brand Country Inns & Sites) will make their presence felt soon.

Hilton will establish a 300-room luxury hotel on Ulsoor Road, Marriott is putting up a 250-room hotel UB City, while Hong Kong-based Shangri-La will set up three hotels in Bangalore, all in the premium bracket. Radisson

too is arriving with a 350-room hotel. Bangalore hotels today enjoy same of the highest tariffs in the country but two years down, it could be a different story. The customer could then be enjoying five star facilities at rates far more affordable.

And the action is not just limited to the five-star segment. There are three-star and four-star properties coming up as well, with standards better than those available today. (Bangalore to get platter of new hotels; Over 3,500 Luxury Rooms May Put An End To Accommodation Woes, Darlington Jose Hector & Sujit John, TOI.B, 20.05.05, K34)

International visitors are increasingly prepared to pay more for hotel rooms in India, reflected in the hospitality industry's growing forex earnings. Bangalore, despite fewer star rooms than Delhi or Mumbai, is generating far higher dollar yields from each guest. In fact, its hospitality business is said to often spill into neighbouring Chennai due to room shortage and high rates. In the last 12 months (July 04 to June 05), the hospitality industry in India's silicon capital has earned more forex (\$20.7 million) from global distribution system (GDS) sales than Delhi (\$15.8 million), Mumbai (\$15.2 million) or Chennai (\$3.2 million). Bangalore's biggest advantage is the large community of international tech corporate who regularly fly into the city and patronise its hotels. At least 'for now this stream of business shows no signs drying up, and is in fact said to be only growing, year on year. (B'lore tops in hospitality dollar earning, Girish Rao, ET.B, 30.07.05, K34)

The largest amusement park in the country 'Wonder-la', nestled in the picturesque Bidadi village on the Bangalore Mysore national highway, 29 km from Bangalore, will be opened to the public from October 1. Mr Kochouseph Chittilapilly said that after the success of Veega Land, an ISO 14001 certified amusement park at Kochi, the V-Guard group had selected Bangalore to play host to 'Wonder-la'. He said the park, coming up in a sprawling 88 acres of land, was built at an estimated cost of over Rs 77 crore in the first phase. Construction work started in August 2003 and was completed with a work force of over 1,400, including engineers and technocrats. (V-Guard's amusement park 'Wonder-la' to open in Bangalore, BL.B, 22.09.05, K34 / D20b)

K40 Tourism Policy and Plans

The Tourism Department is in the process of constituting an expert committee to look into ways and means of implementing the project, which includes a ropeway at an altitude of 1,478 metres at Nandi Hills. Joint Commissioner, Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC), S N Gowrishankar, said that the committee would include secretaries of various departments including horticulture and tourism, and would be headed by the Chief Secretary. The committee will later submit a feasibility report to the government. A Nandi Hills Development Authority would also be set up, a proposal for which has been forwarded to the government. (Nandi Hills ropeway on way, Tourism department to set up committee soon, S Praveen Dhaneshkar, VT.B, 21.06.05, K40)

Karnataka has drawn up plans to improve the Hampi heritage tourism centre and the coastal areas in the State to improve the infrastructure to attract more foreign tourists. The Government has approached both the Japan Bank for international Cooperation (JBIC) and the Central Government to raise Rs 1,200 crore for the proposed projects to be implemented over five years. The State had also sought a Rs 615 crore assistance from the Centre for improving and strengthening coastal tourism by providing adequate infrastructure in the 315-km long coastal areas of the State. (Karnataka draws plans to improve tourism, TH.B, 28.07.05, K40)

Although the Karnataka government has identified more than 150 tourism destinations including the famous Mysore, Hampi and Bangalore, only few attract tourists around the year. Competition from the neighbouring states has, however, forced the state government to give a facelift to the lesser known tourism spots in the state. It is developing infrastructure in lesser known destinations like Melekotte (where the Chalukyas had constructed a famous Cheluvarayana Swamy temple), Belur and Halebidu (the places known for ancient sculptures), Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal and Mahakutta. A project, Integrated Development of Chitradurga Fort, is also on in south Karnataka. Gomateswar Temple in Sravanabelagola has been included in the Circuit Development Programme. The government pays special attention here as the Gomateswar festival is celebrated once in 12 years and attracts lakhs of Jains from across India. Development work is being undertaken at Kokkrellur, under Rural Tourism Development programme. St Mary's Island, Malpe, Ullall and Maravante

beaches and Kodachandri hills are other place that is being developed. (Karnataka wakes up to competition, Jaishankar Jayaramiah, FE.D, 04.09.05, K40)

There is a need to review the taxation system in the State to help promote tourism, said P K Mohan Kumar, Regional Director of the Taj Group of Hotels. He said a single for tax payment has to be put in place of multiple levies like sales tax, luxury tax and entertainment tax.

Setting up a tourism police platoon in Karnataka on the lines of the ones in Goa, Rajasthan and Kerala would also prove to be of help. Development and upgrading of infrastructure in major cities across the state would boost tourism, besides categorising into medical, shopping, weekend, cricket, spa and spiritual tourism, he said. (Taxation review, a must to improve tourism, VT.B, 17.09.05, K40)

The Karnataka High Court has upheld the amendment in luxury tax for the rooms of clubs which provide hotel type comforts. Justice D V Shailendra Kumar, who heard the petition of several City-based clubs like Century Club, Bowring Institute, Bangalore Club, Bangalore Golf Club, said that the State Government has the right to levy luxury tax. The Karnataka Luxury Tax Act 1977 was amended in 2000, which brought in the provision to extend the luxury tax to the club rooms which was applicable to the hotel rooms. Accordingly, a 5 % tax was levied on rooms in the Rs 150-Rs 200 category, 10 % for rooms with a tariff of Rs 200-Rs 400 and a tax of 12 % for those above Rs 400. (Luxury tax for clubs upheld, VT.B, 10.11.05, K40)

Karnataka government expects tourist flows in the state to double within next 3-4 years helped by increasing partnership with the private entrepreneurs to promote tourism in the state. The annual tourist flow in the state during last year stood at 45 lakhs, 10% of which comprised of foreigners. A beach resort is coming up by the end of next month at Karwar which is a private initiative to promote beach tourism in the state. The government is also considering the methodology by which lands would be offered to the private entrepreneurs for the development of infrastructure which, in turn, will help the growth of to tourism industry.

In fact, the state tourism department has changed its theme from 'Theatre of Inspiration' to 'One State, Many Worlds' in a bid to promote Karnataka as a major tourist destination in the country. The total revenue of Karnataka State Tourism Corporation of India stood at Rs 22 crore for the financial year 2004-05. (K'taka banks on PPP model to enhance tourist inflow, Somasroy Chakraborty, FE.C, 30.11.05, K40)

The State Government will formulate heritage regulations on the conservation and protection of heritage buildings in the State. The draft prepared by the authorities will be tabled before the legislature in March, for approval. It will give control over all heritage structures.

The Regulation of Heritage Structures Act will delegate powers to the government to decide on the renovation and protection of heritage structures. Heritage commissioner K.R. Ramakrishna said the government had planned to bring Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Kittur, Mysore and Srirangapatna, Kudalasangama, Kagenale and other areas under the heritage areas.

He disclosed that the documentation of all heritage buildings with details on style, status, historical importance apart from conservation tips for individual heritage buildings will also be conducted. (Govt to formulate Heritage Act, IE.B, 06.12.05, K40)

The Karnataka Government would set up a 'think tank committee' involving experts in tourism business to strengthen the campaign to attract tourists into the State. The proposal was awaiting clearance the Minister for Tourism, Mr D.T. Jayakumar, said the committee would meet once in three months to give direction to the industry.

The Minister said that though the budgetary allocation (plan and non-plan) of Rs 75 crore was inadequate, efforts would be made to have proper coordination between various departments.

Plan details: Giving details of the proposals, the Tourism Secretary, Ms Shanta Kumari, said the department had embarked upon a "tourism mission" and it would involve the private sector, municipalities, public works department etc. The list of roads, which needed immediate attention, had been sent to the public works department. The department had demarcated nine new tourist circuits to enhance tourism in Karnataka and

entrepreneurs would be provided land at reasonable rates (Karnataka to set up committee to strengthen tourism campaign, BL.B, 14.01.06, K40)

At a brainstorming session, involving entrepreneurs and government officials and moderated by 'branding' specialist Harish Bijoor, Tourism minister D T Jayakumar said the department plans a public-private 'think tank' or advisory committee to monitor the sector.

New plans: This stress on 'privatising' the sector found echoes in the views of Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) MD Vinay Luthra and principal secretary tourism, Shantakumari. She said the department is forming nine tourism circuits: like Malnad Coastal Karnataka and Hampi-Badami-Pattadakal-Aihole. Luthra said JLR and Infrastructure Development Corporation of Karnataka, will in a month's time, finalise a study of unopened wilderness in Karnataka. "We will categorise places into A, B and C zones. Only JLR will operate in 'A' zone; in 'B,' we will set up infrastructure but outsource management and in 'C', we will acquire the land and give it to private parties," he added. (Tourism on rebranding mode; Karnataka will Cash in on its Many Destinations, TOI.B, 14.01.06, K40)

The Karnataka Government, which has planned various tourism development activities, has submitted a Rs 611-crore proposal to the Centre. Mr D.T. Jayakumar, said that the development of Maravanthe and Malpe beaches in Udupi district, Panambur beach in Dakshina Kannada district, and Gokarna beach in Uttara Kannada district is included in this proposal.

He said that the project proposals are likely to be included in the forthcoming Budget. The Government has requested the Centre to relax coastal regulator zone norms in the State, as they have come in the way of beach tourism development. He said some private parties have shown interest in beach tourism. The Minister said that three houseboats are ready for inauguration at Devbagh in Karwar of Uttara Kannada district. Rs 611 crore proposal also includes the development of adventure tourism in the State. (Karnataka submits Rs 611-cr tourism proposal to Centre, BL.B, 10.02.06, K40)

Buoyed by the enhanced budgetary allocation for tourism (from Rs. 16 crores to Rs. 52 crores), the Tourism Department has chalked out several programmes to firm up public-private partnerships. Confirming this strategy at "Connect '06-Karnataka Tourism" organised by the department, Deputy Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and Tourism Minister B. Sriramulu said finance will not be a constraint to tap the tourism potential of Karnataka.

While the private sector listed out roadblocks in developing, tourism in the State, government officials, led by Principal Secretary L. Shantakumari, held out promises, stating that these challenges have to be overcome together. Acknowledging the stumbling blocks in tourism, Ms. Shantakumari said the Government will come up with a road map that will be pro-active. The department has identified 700 km of roads leading to various tourist destinations and these will be repaired/upgraded by zilla panchayats and the Public Works Department at a cost of Rs. 50 crores. Ms. Shantakumari said the other challenges include strengthening public-private partnership, upgrading tourism-related infrastructure, clearance of projects by single window agency, improving air and road connectivity, relaxation of taxation policies such as exemption from entry tax, and power and water subsidy for hotels.

She said the department has developed eight circuits covering 98 tourist destinations. They are Belgaum (11 destinations), Madikeri (11), Malnad (19), Bijapur (17), Maidan (12), Southern I (7) and II (6), and Coastal (15).

At these destinations, the development will be at three levels: strengthening basic facilities, providing amenities for budget travellers and setting up three- star and five star accommodation. For the budget traveller, it will invite private entrepreneurs to develop and operate tourist complexes, restaurants and amusement parks. (Road map to develop tourism on the cards, TH.B, 26.03.06, K40)

K50 Tourism Issues

The wave of new economy is set to rouse Mysore into full wakefulness with a tourism expert panel suggesting more active nightlife that will inject a booster shot to the ready-to-soar tourism in the city. An expert committee,

which is studying Mysore under the 'Destination Tourism' project for the last two days, said the city "lacks vibrancy". "Very little of late evening and night activity" said Neeraj Bachkethi, V-P (consultancy and business development), India Tourism Development Corporation. The committee held a meeting with the civic stakeholders to boost tourism sector. The city has been swallowing up suburban outback in its growth in the last two decades, but nightlife is conspicuous by its near-absence. Also, the committee suggested strengthening of tourist infrastructure, for which funds aren't a problem, according to the panel chief. The panel will submit its report in three weeks and the project is likely to be sanctioned by August, 05.

Floating restaurant: The committee also suggested a 'floating restaurant' at Dalvoy Lake and fountains with illumination at Kukkarahalli Lake to give a boost to tourism in Mysore. (Mysore, time to rock! ITDC Suggests Nightlife, Bazaars, TOI.B, 19.04.05, K50/ B31)

Interview with Mahendra Jain, Tourism Commissioner, KSTDC

Q. Why has Karnataka been unable to attract as many tourists as has Kerala?

A. In overall terms, our arrivals are only marginally less than Kerala's, both domestic and foreign. However, considering that Karnataka is five times bigger, in terms of size and population, the numbers will not seem impressive. Besides, Kerala began consciously promoting tourism 20 years ago, whereas we began less than a decade back. However, our efforts have begun yielding results much faster.

Q. When infrastructure is the key, why hasn't Karnataka realised this?

A. That's not true. Over the last few years, the state government has undertaken projects to provide basic infrastructure to key destinations. Roads and wayside facilities have been set-up in many places. But we need private partners to set up hotels and restaurants. In Pattadakal, our other heritage site, there is no hotel at all. It is this area that we are working on.

Q. When the realisation is there, why are budgetary allocations not matched?

A. Each state sets its own priorities. Unlike Kerala, Karnataka has other strong sectors like IT and BT which have brought the state revenues and name. For Kerala, tourism is the main income-generating sector and so it is a priority for them. For us, there are other priorities and hence allocations are based on priorities. We have Rs 16.5 crore for 2005-06 while they have Rs 76.25 crore. We have about Rs 1 crore for publicity and promotion whereas they have more than Rs 12 crore.

(Karnataka tourism, a trip tease? Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 29.04.05, K50)

Tourism arrivals into Karnataka went up by about 20 percent in the year of the coalition government. But that was not due to the new dispensation. In fact, Karnataka is probably the only state in the country whose tourism allocation has gone down. From Rs 17 crore in 2004-05, it was cut to Rs 16.5 crore for the current year.

With less than a crore for publicity and promotion last year, Karnataka tourism failed to even publicise its tourist potential. Much of rest of the allocation has gone towards meeting administrative expenses, leaving very little for infrastructure.

Worse still, the state government has been unable to meet the promises it made in its budget. Though tourism appeared to be low on the coalition government's priorities, Deputy Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced his (the government's) interest in preserving the state's heritage in his 04-05 budget.

Mysore was declared a heritage city, while five others — Srirangapatna, Bidar, Bijapur, Gulbarga and Kittur — were designated heritage towns, the post of heritage commissioner was created, a senior IAS officer was

posted and was given all of Rs 3 crore. But like all good things, it was short lived. Barely weeks later, the officer was out. The heritage plan is still being formulated, while nobody has accounted for the Rs 3 crore.

Fortunately for Karnataka, the Centre dramatically increased funding and provided the state over Rs 40 crore last year, which enabled the government to improve facilities at many places. These include expansion of some eco-tourism activities, including the preparation of a feasibility report, development of Bannerghatta National Park, development of Kodagu and a Kodava heritage centre in Madikeri, integrated development of Chitradurga Fort, development of the northern and southern circuits, development of the Bhadra wilderness camp and a few other tourist centres. (Monumental neglect of tourism, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 20.05.05, K50)

The proposed entry of British Airways, Northwest Airlines, Air France and additional flights from Lufthansa into Bangalore has thrown some fresh business opportunities and greater pressure on rooms of five-star hotels. According to market sources, Le Meridien has managed to corner the largest share of crew business, followed by the Leela and Oberoi. An estimated 4, 200 seats a week (19 flights) will be added to the city's inventory from this November. Even if a fifth of them opt for star hotel rooms, the additional demand-supply gap will be at least 840 rooms weekly. Finally, there may not be enough rooms to exploit this business opportunity.

While the crew business does not necessarily guarantee the highest room tariff, it definitely promises fixed utilisation through the year for the hotels. It is however said by sources that Bangalore crew occupancy rates are higher than other metros like Mumbai or Delhi given its higher average room realizations. Bangalore has 1,600 odd five star rooms — a number which falls short by almost 100% during peak season. The five star hotels in Bangalore are expected to register occupancy in excess of 88% this winter. Since weekends taper out, it means during week days there may be over 100% occupancy or more than one set of guest/guests staying and vacating the room on the same day.

Incidentally, the city's airport is already facing tremendous pressure with its limited space. The airport handles around 57 international flights in a week now, which will be raised to 76 from November. (More airlines spell money for upmarket hotels, Girish Rao, ET.B, 20.08.06, K50 / K34)

The Mysore district administration has introduced a "Home Stays Programme" to accommodate more far-off tourists during the Navaratri festivities. The programme, also known as Atithi, has been introduced for the first time to meet the shortage of accommodation at hotels and guest houses.

The Home Stays programme has also invited applications from Karigatha in Srirangapatna, Hootagalli, Dattagalli and Belavadi on the outskirts and old localities like Fort Mohalla and Krishnaragavanam. Some residents have volunteered to host tourists and serve mallige idly, masala dosa, Mysore pak.

Houses will be categorised as A, B and C groups and tariff fixed accordingly. Any harassment to tourists will be sternly dealt with. Officials will list Mysorean families eligible to extend 'Home Stays'. A brochure will be published enlisting details of the houses; phone numbers and the tariff to enable tourists find homely stays. (Mysore homes open for tourists, BY K Shivakumar, IE.C, 22.09.05, K50)

A tourism park will be set up in 100 acres of land near the international airport coming up at Devanahalli, near Bangalore, at an estimated cost of Rs.50 crores, Minister for Tourism D.T. Jayachandra has said. A master plan has been prepared for the park, which is proposed to be developed by the Centre and the State Government. It will offer packaged tours covering leading tourist centres in the State.

Fourteen Jungle Lodges and Resorts are being given a face-lift. It has been decided to hand over 18 hotels maintained by the Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) to ONGC to develop them on a Build-Own-Operate and Transfer (BOOT) basis. (Rs.50-crore tourism park on the cards, TH.B, 18.01.06, K50)

Mysoreans are of late being dubbed as the wrong people in the right place. For, they have miserably failed in playing host to the flow of tourists, which has touched an all-time high in recent times. The home-stay concept

introduced by Tourism Department has met with cold response from the locals. Introduced during last Dasara, at present just two households in the entire city is offering home-stay facility.

Interestingly, the concept has worked out well in the neighbouring district of Kodagu. Here, nearly 400 households are running the business, even posing a threat to local hotels. (Stay-home tourism fails to interest Mysoreans, P M Raghunandan, DH.B, 07.02.06, K50)

In a judgment of far-reaching consequences, the Supreme Court has held running a hotel in a residential area is impermissible. A Division Bench comprising Justice S B Sinha and Justice P K Balasubramanyam held such change of land use (to hotels) cannot be permitted under the provisions of Town and Country Planning Act.

The ruling was given in a case where a person had purchased a house in Jayanagar, a residential area. He applied with the BOA for change of land use, which was subsequently granted. However, when he started a restaurant on the land, residents of Jayanagar 5th Block challenged the same.

The Karnataka High Court, however rejected, their petition saying objections had been called for from the Welfare Association which had said it had no objection.

Aggrieved residents then approached the Supreme Court. The Apex court, while setting aside the High Court order, held that running a hotel in a residential area is not permissible having regard to the zoning regulations.

Change in Land use

- ◆ Section 14-A of the Town and Country Planning Act states change in land use
- ◆ Should be one in public interest
- ◆ Change should not contravene any provisions of the Act
- ◆ Proposed changes should be intimated in one or more daily newspaper

(No hotels in residential areas, VT.B, 08.03.06, K50)

K51 Coastal Tourism

Udupi MLA K. Raghupathi Bhat has opposed the move to privatise Malpe Beach in the name of tourism development. Bhat said at a news conference that promoters of Paradise Isle Beach Resort, developed at Malpe Beach, have been trying to take possession of the beach depriving the public of the right to use it. They have also been pressuring the Government to vacate fishermen's houses from the vicinity, alleging CRZ violations. Bhat opposed the move of bio fencing the beach and allotting the beach area to a private party. (Privatisation of Malpe Beach opposed, IE.B, 06.04.05, K51)

The Minister for Tourism, D.T. Jayakumar, has said that the government is planning to promote beach tourism in a big way in the State. Addressing presspersons, Mr. Jayakumar said the State has 315 km of pristine beaches in Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada districts. The Government intends to build a road close to the coast under its "Marine Drive" project. The Government will approach either the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to finance the development of the marine drive. The potential of beach tourism in the State is immense, he said.

States such as Goa and Kerala have promoted beach tourism in a big way. There are more than 18,000 rooms by the side of the beaches in Kerala and nearly 30,000 in Goa. Since the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms make it difficult to build hotels near the seashore, the Government will encourage families having beachside houses to build additional rooms.

This will solve the problem of room shortage and also generate additional revenue for the families concerned, besides helping tourism in the State. Towards this end, the Government will promote the concepts of "family tourism" and "village tourism." The cooperation of the people is essential for the success of tourism, he said.

Sea erosion: On tackling sea erosion, the Minister said the marine drive project might also help solve the sea erosion problem in some areas of the coastal districts. Sea erosion is a recurring problem. Efforts will be made to find a lasting solution to it, Mr. Jayakumar said. (Karnataka to promote beach tourism, TH.D, 05.06.05, K51)

The former Chief Minister of Karnataka, Mr Veerappa Moily, has said that industrialists have not come forward to establish any industry in the coastal districts of Karnataka for the last several years due to resistance by environmentalists. He said that environmental organisations are opposing the implementation of small, medium and large industries in the name of environment protection. The district administrations of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi should take strict action to prevent any inconvenience to investors. ('Eco activists impeding industrial activity in coastal Karnataka', TH.B, 29.08.05, K51)

The Karnataka High Court ordered the removal of all illegal encroachments and constructions on Malpe beach in Udupi, which violated the coastal regulation zone (CRZ) notification.

In its order, a Division Bench, comprising Justice B. Padmaraj and Justice V. Jagannathan, said the beach will have to be kept clean and that the CRZ notification had been issued to protect the ecology and environment in coastal areas. Constructions raised in violation of such regulations could not be condoned and all such structures would have to go.

The Bench passed the order on public interest litigation (PIL) petition by Murthy K. of Bangalore seeking a direction to remove encroachments, illegal structures and slums on the beach. (Clear encroachments on Malpe beach, says court, TH.B, 19.11.05, K51)

K53 Heritage Tourism

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) are likely to sign a MoU on plying buses within the World Heritage Site of Hampi. The proposal is aimed at providing transportation to tourists to go from one historical monument to another. The idea, if implemented, will prevent the movement of private vehicles within the heritage site to a great extent. The plan is to ply buses between Virupaksha Temple and the Vijaya Vittala temple complex, via 'Kadlekal', and 'Sasivekal' Ganesh idols, Ugra Narasimha, Queen's bath, Mahanavami Dibba, Lotus Mahal, the elephant stables, and Hazara Rama Temple. The tourists can board these buses, which will make circuit trips, and alight at the places of their choice before moving on to another monument. (Plan to make tourists' Hampi visit memorable, M Ahiraj, TH.B, 08.04.05, K53)

The world's tallest monolithic statue, towering 58 ft into the sky, is the cynosure of all eyes in this celebrated pilgrimage centre as it awaits the grand Mahamastakabhisheka in February 06.

While the authorities draw up plans to handle millions of people expected to arrive in the days leading to the main event, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Bangalore Circle, has taken up conservation measures on the 1,000-year-old Gomateshwara statue atop the Indragiri Hills whose benign smile seems to be appreciative of the work in progress.

Conservation measures: The Superintending Archaeologist of the ASI, Bangalore Circle, S.V.P. Halkatti said the statue itself is in good condition, but the supporting structures need to be strengthened in view of the massive turnout expected from all over India and the world.

The ASI has followed scientific conservation principles in the process. Traditional construction materials that went into the making of the monument and its surrounding structures have been used," he said. The ASI has outsourced some of the services and roped in conservation architects specialising in restoration of monuments and heritage structures. Dr. Halkatti said conservation efforts were undertaken by the department in the past, but now there are specialists who understand the principles of heritage conservation and are able to meet our requirements. (Shravanabelagola being spruced up fast by ASI, R. Krishna Kumar, TH.B, 14.06.05, K53)

A comprehensive village development project in a little village called Anegundi, a stone's throw from Hampi, is all set to become the nation's model for rural tourism. Constantly under Hampi's shadow, Anegundi has

never gained prominence. However, the little village is a home to numerous temples and architecture which pre-date Hampi. As part of the central government sponsored rural tourism, Anegundi is now gaining importance on its own steam.

"In association with a local NGO Kishkinda Trust, multifaceted development has been taking place. Apart from essential infrastructure, a lot of skills and employment generation programmes have been launched. Local women have been taught to utilise locally available material to make a variety of articles and sell them," Tourism Commissioner Mahendra Jain.

However, more novels are the concept of converting ancient houses into guest rooms for tourists, which are maintained and managed by the locals. In tandem, the Trust has undertaken a variety of conservation measures encompassing both architecture and culture, and showcased for tourists. Anegundi is among five rural tourism projects that the central government has chosen for funding in Karnataka. Of the other four in Karnataka, Banavasi near Sirsi and Nalaknadu palace in Kodagu are being taken up as architectural locations.

The remaining two destinations are eco-tourism spots: Kokkarebellur near Mandya and Attiveri bird sanctuary in Uttara Kannada district. (Rural tourism to change Anegundi's face, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 19.07.05, K53 / K54)

The dangers of pollution are hovering over the Hampi world heritage site. 'The Central government funded Rs 2,100 crore Bellary Thermal Power Station is being set up on NH-63 near Thoranagallu on 1,767 acres of land. The first phase of this 500 mega watt power plant is scheduled to be completed by October 2006. Environmentalists are of the opinion that once the power plant is in place, the various gases emitted from the plant, such as sulphur oxide, nitric oxide and other gases will silently pollute the Hampi site.

Karnataka Power Corporation Limited Executive Director Jayaprakash has, however said that all measures are being taken to ensure that the Hampi site is not affected by the setting up of the power plant. He said that Rs.600 crore has been spent towards this and as per the Centre rules; the chimney is being set up at a height of over 275 metres.

No impact study done: The State Archaeology Department has not shown any attention to the possible harm that may be caused to the Hampi ruins by the emissions of the thermal power station. A senior official of the department said that an impact study' on the harm to Hampi by the power plant has not yet been done. State Archaeological Department Deputy Director' Chikkamaregowda said that following complaints by concerned citizens about the possible harm to Hampi, the repercussions are being looked into. Hampi Development Authority Chairman and Bellary Deputy Commissioner Arvind Srivastava said that the entire project has to be reviewed before it is executed. (Hampi faces danger! This time from thermal plant, M T Shivakumar, DH.B, 02.08.05, K53)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has formulated a major plan to conduct an 'impact study' of mining on historical monuments in and around Hampi. The draft plan called 'risk preparedness' is ready for implementation. Archaeologists of national and international repute will conduct a thorough research on damage caused to monuments by floods in the Tungabhadra, natural calamities, mining and other causes. They will then submit a detailed report on the steps to be taken towards conserving the Hampi monuments to the Central government through the ASI. This measure is said to be one of the rarest actions taken by the ASI in protecting historical monuments.

Most of the structures in Hampi are weakening after being exposed to the elements for centuries together. The Vijaya Vittala temple has developed hundreds of cracks following enemy attacks and arson. The ASI has support beams and pillars to protect the monument. But a small accident is all it takes to cause grave damage to the temple.

Apart from this, hundreds of small temples, mantaps, bastions *et al* are in danger of collapsing. Most of them sport shrubs growing out of the crevices, nooks and corners. Though lack of protection for centuries together is said to be the main cause, it maybe noted here that mining has also contributed majorly to the situation. Mining is carried on at Sandur and Hospet which are close by; large amount of explosives are being used on a daily basis. Even buildings of the Hampi Kannada University have not escaped the damage caused by these explosions, according to Vice-Chancellor Dr BA Vivek Rai.

If the risk preparedness plan kicks off, experts will be able to give suitable opinion and guidance on various topics, including regulating mining, scientific conservation of the structures, clearing the encroachments in several monuments etc. (Study on mining impact in Hampi, M T Shivakumar, DH.B, 21.11.05, K53)

If this materialises, then the heritage of Srirangapatna, renowned for its tryst with foreign powers under Tipu Sultan in his fight against the British, will receive a thrust from the automobile major Mercedes-Benz. It is still early days, but the legendary car manufacturer in the luxury segment with an enviable heritage of its own, has expressed interest in restoration of the heritage sites in Srirangapatna. Similarly, experts from England and France are keen to revive the heritage of Srirangapatna as both the countries have a historic association with the island. (Auto major keen to restore heritage of Srirangapatna; Mercedes-Benz expresses interest in conservation efforts in Tipu Sultan's capital, TH.B, 06.12.05, K53)

Buddha is on the rocks again: the Centre has upbraided Karnataka for its diametrically opposite views on the proposed statue of Buddha at Ramanagaram. .

Did ecological wisdom dawn on the state government by accident? That is the stinker the Centre has sent to the state. In a letter dated December 6, 2005, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has lambasted the state's forest, environment and ecology department for changing its stance overnight on ecological issues vis-à-vis the 712-foot Buddha statue to be carved out of the Handigondi rock.

Do thorough field verification rather than take superficial stands that can be altered at a later date, is the Centres' parting shot. For now, on paper the Buddha project is simply off because the state which had approved the behemoth plan reversed its stance on the project and recommended that it be shelved. Sources in the Sanghamitra Foundation, the organisation that has been fighting to see the project take off, say they will fight it out in the court.

While forwarding the Buddha project proposal to the Central government, authorities certified that "the project would not affect any monument of historical, religious, archaeological or recreational importance... The project would not cause any environmental damage..."

This approval was granted in November 2004. In August 2005, the very department that granted unconditional approval did a 360 degrees shift and wrote to the Centre seeking withdrawal on grounds of "antiquity of the rock, its archaeological and heritage value, large variety of flora and fauna, critically endangered bird and mammal species". (Buddha statue row gets life, Centre Sends Stinker to State for Changing Stance Overnight, Smitha Rao, TOI.B, 12.12.05, K53)

The Gulbarga fort is fighting unsuccessfully to keep the encroachers at bay. The approach road to this historical place has been reduced to a pothole filled cart-way. Even though the fort and its buildings have been recognised as national monuments by the Archaeological Survey of India and is on the tourist map, nothing has been done by the ASI to protect this 'magnificent bridge', except hoards proclaiming that these buildings are guided by The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Remains Act of 1958 (24 of 1958). Many have encroached upon this land now. Lines of nearly 200 'illegal' houses dot the vast expanse of the fort area within, including kuccha-pucca, and RCC-roofed houses. (Gulbarga fort now fights encroachment, Ananad V Yamnur, DH.B, 09.01.06, K53)

With many of the pilgrims and tourists attending the millennium first Mahamastakabhisheka at Shravanbelgoa also visiting Mysore to see its famous tourist spots, the local Jain Samaj is gearing up to provide free lodging and boarding for pilgrims passing through. More than 40,000 pilgrims visiting Mysore will be served traditional Rajasthani dishes and south Indian delicacies. In all, more than 200 NRIs from USA, Germany and other countries visited the city and proceeded towards Sharavanbelgola to take part in the festival. (Mysore plays host to Jain pilgrims, K Shiva Kumar, IE.B, 10.01.06, K53)

The 700-foot tall monolithic Buddha statue planned to be carved out of the rocks at Ramanagaram by the Bangalore-based Sanghamitra Foundation, is not likely to materialise. A year ago, the foundation held a major fund raising programme featuring Bollywood actors. When details of the statue project came to light, it was immediately opposed by environmentalists. The statue was to come up at Handigondi, where a number of these giant rock formations stand. The foundation had offered to buy 10 acres of land around the rocks. The

Union Ministry of Environment and Forests is reported to have withdrawn the permission given for the statue to be carved out. The Union Ministry has also asked the State Government to consider declaring the area a wildlife sanctuary. (Buddha statue project dropped, Union Ministry of Environment and Forests withdraws permission, TH.B, 18.01.06, K53)

A team from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is likely to visit the Hampi World Heritage Site. The purpose is to review the implementation of suggestions and guidelines issued by UNESCO after Hampi was placed in the "List of World Heritage Sites in Danger". The team will discuss the steps taken to finalise the Integrated Site Management Plan (ISMP) prepared for the management of the Hampi World Heritage Site and guidelines being prepared for villages in the heritage site area.

Hampi is the only World Heritage Site in the country to have an ISMP for conservation, protection, management and development. The ISMP has been prepared by a team of experts from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, headed by Nalini Thakur. The draft ISMP was discussed at the stake-holders' meeting in Hospet last year. Representatives of UNESCO participated in the meeting. (UNESCO team to inspect Hampi this month, TH.B, 05.02.06, K53)

With only two days to go for the Mahamastakabhisheka to begin, all rooms in hotels and lodges in the district headquarters are full. Jain pilgrims from north India had booked hotel rooms two months in advance.

With accommodation being limited in and around Shravanabelagola, tourists and pilgrims have chosen to camp in Hassan, which is about 50 km from the pilgrim town. With the KSRTC deploying additional buses to Shravanabelagola from Hassan, many people feel commuting would not be a problem.

Hoysala Village on the outskirts of the city has 33 rooms, and they had been booked in November itself said Sabu Varghese, manager of the resort. The situation is similar in Southern Star. The hotel management has reported full occupancy for three days from February 8th. Rooms had been booked some six months ago. The hotel has hired people to cook Jain food for entire February.

According to sources in Mahamastakabhisheka Committee (MMC), Shravanabelagola is a small town administered by the gram panchayat and it has gained a semi-urban status by virtue of being a pilgrim centre and a tourist destination. Though it has good accommodation facilities with guesthouse it is difficult to provide accommodation for everyone. The satellite towns that have come up are expected to accommodate more than 30,000 visitors. Efforts have been made to provide all facilities in these towns. There has been a delay in completing the work on the five types of cottages. The cottages are expected to accommodate nearly 300 people. But the delay in completion of the work has created problems for the MMC. However, the committee is hopeful of getting at least 10 cottages ready. (Hotels report full occupancy of rooms, TH.B, 06.02.06, K53)

Jindal South West Foundation, the CSR arm of the JSW Steel Ltd., has taken up the restoration of the World Heritage Site, Hampi in Vijayanagar. The restoration work has begun with the Sri Chandramouleshwara temple located on the north east of Hampi, on the banks of the river Tungabhadra which is on the island of Rishikmukh.

The Hampi Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the JSW, was formed in 2000. It signed a MoU with the Government of Karnataka last November. The Foundation is working with Global Heritage Fund (GHF) in San Francisco and the World Monuments Fund in New York. The restoration process will be done in two phases. The first phase involves condition mapping, the structural consolidation of the temple and the stone embankments, and also the architectural restoration of stones, brickwork and lime stucco. The second phase involves the illumination of the temple and the site. The whole process is likely to be finished in two years. The company is spending approximately Rs 1, crore in the restoration project. (Raising a city from ruins, Sulekha Nair, FE.D, 19.02.06, K53)

Srikantadatta Narasimharaja Wadiyar wants to convert heritage properties into five-star hotels in Kerala and Karnataka. Wadiyar, who owns the Fernhill Palace in Ooty and the under-renovation Rajendra Vilas Palace, has identified a few heritage properties that can be converted into hotels in Leh, Munnar, Kovalam, Kochi and Coorg in South India.

He has also plans to adopt few properties in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Pune and other States. The Wadiyars have purchased Woodcock Hall, a heritage property, Palace of Hyderabad, and Prime Minister Solargium in Ooty. The heritage property spreads over 2.5 acres and has 25 rooms with wooden flooring. The Regency Villa is also owned by the royal family, Wadiyar disclosed that the renovated heritage properties in Kerala are very popular among tourists. There are plans to invest \$90 million including \$50 million on the airlines project and \$40 million to convert heritage properties into hotels, which would add another 800 rooms in the next three years. Wadiyar said that he has applied for 'No Dues' certificate and will file wealth tax within a couple of weeks. He has also sought residential certificate from Home Ministry to apply for licence to run air services within a year. His wife Promada Devi will redesign the heritage hotels and the interiors of the aircraft. (Wadiyar to convert heritage sites into hotels., IE.B, 22.03.06, K53)

K55 Eco and Wildlife Tourism

Indian People's Tribunal (IPT), a non governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to the cause of environment and human rights, has urged both central and state governments to cancel the entire Kudremukh national park project in the best interest of the tribals of the region. Briefing reporters about the contents of the report, Suresh said the genesis of all the troubles faced by the tribals and the unrest in the Malnad region was the conversion of forest area inhabited by the tribals into the national park. (NGO demands scrapping of Kudremukh national park, VT.B, 20.04.05, K55)

Country Club (I) Ltd (CCIL) has acquired its first wildlife property 'Bush-Betta' located in the Bandipur wildlife national park near Mysore. The acquisition of the wildlife resort located on a 20-acre expanse was announced by Mr Y. Rajeev Reddy, Chairman and Managing Director of CCIL. The company has invested Rs 20 crore both for acquisition and renovation of the property. The 'Country Club Bush-Betta Resort' currently has 60 cottages. Country Club plans to add another about 100 rooms in the Bush-Betta resort in the next two years.

To propel its growth in this booming wildlife tourism, Country Club would be investing Rs 100 crore in the next two years. It plans to add six more properties in Ooty, Goa, Khandala, Kodaikanal, Shimla and Kerala. It would soon open its offices in New York, UK, and major cities in northern India to market its timeshare properties. (Country Club acquisition, BL.B, 04.05.05, K55)

Developing tourism in Kodagu to boost its economy, otherwise dependent on coffee, has been the favourite rhetoric with the district administration, tourist operators, and tourism authorities. No serious effort has gone into making Kodagu a commercially viable tourist destination, irrespective of opposition from some quarters that commercialism can spoil the region. Lethargy and lack of response have left the issue of tourism development in Kodagu remain only on paper.

Systemising trekking: The proposed moves of the Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) to systematise trekking in the chosen locations of the Western Ghats, appear to be the right decision to attract nature lovers to the district. The JLR has reportedly asked the Forest Department to prepare a plan to start trekking operations in a systematic manner and to constitute village forest committees comprising villagers and Forest Department personnel in Naladi, Yavakapadi and Kunjila villages for popularising trekking in Kodagu.

In the absence of Government-sponsored tourism and unresponsive private operators, home stay concept has become very popular in Kodagu. However, home stay facilities could come under the scanner of the district administration in the coming days because some have started expressing reservations over their functioning. (Attracting nature lovers to 'God's own paradise', TH.B, 02.09.05, K55)

The Bannerghatta National Park, parts of which is now designated a Biological Park, is going to get a facelift. An average of 5000 tourists and locals visit Bannerghatta every day and around 30 % more on weekends. With such a large number of visitors throughout the year, the park authorities face the problem of disposing of paper, plastic and other inorganic waste. With few good eateries in the vicinity, most visitors bring picnic lunches with paper and plastic plates. According to Forest Department officials, the waste lying around poses a serious health hazard to animals. (Facelift for Bannerghatta Park soon, TH.B, 25.12.05, K55)

The thick forest area in Chamaraajanagar district, earlier under the “control” of Veerappan, is now being developed into a tourism hot spot by the State Government and is expected to draw the attention of tourists in a big way. The Government launched the ambitious project “Mystery trails” with the local Girijans roped in to serve as guides to the tourists. And with a nominal fee of Rs. 400 per day towards the trekking, the rich Chamaraajanagar forests are expected to be a big draw not merely to the local tourists but also those from abroad who enjoy trekking in the Western Ghats. First time in over 25 years that the Government had decided to promote Chamaraajanagar tourism destination. (Chamaraajanagar forest area to be developed as tourism hot spot, TH.B, 03.01.06, K55)

Karnataka is taking a lead role in developing eco-tourism in the country by guiding other states about the nitty-gritty of the projects. The government has set up a separate wing under the umbrella of the Karnataka Tourism Department called Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) to offer the consultancy services to other states to develop eco-tourism. Currently, JLR is providing consultancy services to Orissa and Jammu & Kashmir, while north eastern states and Madhya Pradesh are in the pipeline. (Karnataka to help other states in eco-tourism, Somasroy Chakraborty, FE.B, 20.01.06, K55)

The Forest Department is planning to bring Biligiri Rangana Hills once part of the forest brigands’ area of operation, under the purview of Project Tiger. The department has proposed to launch what it called Biligiri Rangana Temple Wild Life Sanctuary (BRTWLS) and is optimistic about the proposal being made part of the forthcoming tiger census. Karnataka has already three — Nagarhole National Park, Bandipur and Bhadra tiger reserve - out of a total 28 tiger reserves in the country and all three were included under Project Tiger. According to officials, tiger reserve has a special status with its protection and maintenance as well as the salaries of the staff being met by the Central Government. (BR hills may be included in Project Tiger, Subhash Chandra, VT.B, 19.02.06, K55)

In order to protect the water bird population in Bangalore, the department has mooted an idea of declaring certain wetlands in the city as bird conservation zones. The idea, a first of its kind, will not only help in improving the bird habitat in the City but enable bird lovers to participate in conservation programmes. The Forest department has already begun work in this direction. Work on the mapping of the wetlands where the birds arrive, has begun, while bird-rich areas like Madivala lake, Puttenhalli Lake, Jakkur and Byramangala lake which attract thousands of birds are being monitored. Once the water bodies are declared as conservation zones, they will be brought under the legal provisions and developed to protect the landscape and the flora and fauna of the lakes and surrounding areas. (Proposal to convert wetlands into bird conservation zones, Subhash Chandra, VT.B, 27.03.06, K55)

K56 Nagarhole

It’s a classic example of how the Indian bureaucracy works during a crisis and what it does when the crisis is past. For once the tiger crisis’ which shook the country vanished from the media spotlight, the Project Tiger Directorate has resumed its old ways of functioning.

Nothing could prove the point better than the issue of tribal resettlement from Nagarhole National Park. Though 300 tribal families are keen on availing of the rehab scheme and the Forest Department has already built over 105 houses, the Project Tiger Directorate has declined to release funds for the resettlement.

The resettlement scheme for tribals of Nagarhole and Bhadra found a mention in the Tiger Task Force constituted by the Prime Minister to look into the tiger crisis. The Task Force had also recommended that such models could be emulated in other areas as well. But, the Directorate is taking shelter behind the fact that the funds were not completely used during the last financial year and is thus thwarting the entire resettlement process. The tribals who have registered for the rehabilitation scheme are feeling let down by the Government.

The only thing the Department is waiting for is Central funds as it has to give Rs. one lakh in cash to the families which want to move out. The tribals should have moved last March. Since the construction of houses and the identification of the land was delayed, the Rs. 1.55 crore received from the Centre, which was earmarked for this purpose, was sent back. Now, the repeated pleas of the Forest Department have failed to move the Project Tiger Directorate which has not released the money. (Red tape stalls Nagarhole tribals’ resettlement, Vinay Madhav, IE.B, 13.11.05, K56)

K57 Hill Tourism

Chikmagalur's district administration is a firm believer in the self-help concept, at least where tourism is concerned. Miffed by the low interest levels in Chikmagalur, especially the lack of focussed promotion, the district is attempting an ambitious campaign on its own, linking up with international travel operators and agents. The emphasis will be on nature and wildlife. Chikmagalur has breathtakingly beautiful range of mountains studded with coffee plantations. He agreed that minimum facilities were lacking in some of the destinations, but indicated that efforts are on to address those issues in phases. (Chikmagalur set to lure global tourists, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 22.06.05, K57)

Asia's largest coffee plantation company Tata Coffee Ltd. has diversified into the hospitality sector with the launch of "Plantation Trails," a cluster of holiday homes in Kodagu, set amidst idyllic coffee growing estates in and around Pollibetta, once renowned for its high yielding and fine flavoured Coorg mandarins that were grown as an inter crop.

Tata Coffee's holiday homes are original estate homes or bungalows that were occupied by the planters of Tata Coffee Ltd. in Kodagu.' Plantation Trails will be initially confined to 36 rooms spread over eight estates in Kodagu. (Tatas launch 'Plantation Trails', It will initially be confined to 36 rooms in eight estates in Kodagu, TH.B, 23.02.06, K57)

K59 Golf Tourism

This city is ideally situated to develop a green belt of golf courses all around it, says one of the world's leading "golf architects." Golf courses will create jobs for hundreds and earn some hard currency for the government, says Ronald W. Fream of the U.S. based Fream and Dale Golf Plan, which provides golf course architecture. Apart from visitors, the city has hundreds in the high-income bracket for whom golf can be recreation, lifestyle and even a status symbol. Another suggestion he has is for golf courses to be developed as part of the tech parks. (Bangalore ideal for golf tourism: expert, TH.B, 06.09.05, K59)

■ L – KERALA ■

L10 Policy, Economy

The Kerala Government has drawn up an action plan with an outlay of Rs 13,495 crore to implement the projects identified for its 'Vision 2010' programme. The Governor, Mr R.L. Bhatia, said that five task forces had identified the projects that would be implemented over the next five years. The share of the State Government in the outlay will be 16 %, while the Centre will contribute 6 %. Investments from private sector and financial institutions will account for the balance amount. (Rs 13,495-cr action plan for 'Vision 2010', BL.B, 04.02.06, L10)

L11 Planning

Kerala would bring in a comprehensive legislation to ban child labour in the state, Labour Minister Babu Divakaran said. The draft for the legislation was being considered by the cabinet, Mr Divakaran said. Though children under 14 years of age were not engaged in 'hazardous' jobs, as defined by the International Labour Organisation in the state, any kind of hard work imposed on them would be banned under the new act, he said. (Kerala mulls Bill to ban child labour, FE.B, 13.06.05, L11)

L12 Infrastructure

The State Government will seek financial assistance of Rs 528 crore from the World Bank to complete the Kerala State Transport project that envisages development of State highways and other important roads. The Chief Minister, Mr Oommen Chandy, said after the Cabinet meeting that the Cabinet resolved to go ahead with the project, as it did not make sense to abandon it mid-way. The Government, however, will try to complete the work without incurring excess expenditure. (Kerala to seek Rs 528 cr from World Bank for road project, BL.B, 06.10.05, L12)

Leela Ventures is planning to set up an airport at Kannur in Kerala which would take shape within three years. "Kannur has a garment park, IT park and horticulture park and it needs an airport. Leela will be setting up the project here which will be the first 100% private airport in the country," CP Krishnan Nair, chairman, Leela Venture said. Nair stated that 300 acres of land has already been acquired for the project in north Kerala and another 1,000 acre of land would be acquired after state legislative Assembly elections scheduled in May." (Leela plans airport at Kannur, FE, 04.02.06, L10)

The National Transportation Planning and Research Centre (NATPAC) has just concluded a study for the second phase of the hill highway project, passing through the high ranges in Kerala, suggesting that the implementation of the project be taken up in stages due to large development costs. The study pointed out that the development of the second phase of the highway for a route length of 627.40 km from Palakkad to Thiruvananthapuram would cost around Rs 31,087 lakh. The order of priority would be developing the missing links first and then upgrading major district roads to State highways standards. (Highway to development, V. Sajeev Kumar, BL.B, 13.03.06, L12)

The Cochin Port is floating global expression of interest (EoI) to appoint consultants for designing a world class cruise terminal on the port premises. According to port authorities, the project is envisaged on a public-private partnership and will include construction of a modern cruise jetty and a world class cruise terminal complex-cum-public plaza. To make the project financially viable, the port is planning to develop part of the terminal complex as an accessible public destination, a range of facilities for entertainment, hospitality shopping malls and business and conferencing and trade exhibitions. (Cochin Port seeks consultants for cruise terminal, FE.B, 21.03.06, L12)

L20 Environmental Issues

The Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages (P) Ltd. was permitted by a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court to resume production at its Plachimada plant in Palakkad district, drawing ground water up to five lakh litres per day, the maximum limit fixed by a team of experts of the Central Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM).

The company had not been functioning as the Perumatty gram panchayat had refused to renew the licence granted by it on the grounds that the company was over-exploiting ground water resulting in water scarcity in the area, and was causing environmental pollution.

Disposing of three writ appeals, the court said the panchayat was not justified in rejecting the application for renewal of licence before a scientific assessment of the ground water potential was made. The panchayat had no legal authority to cancel the licence for functioning within the panchayat area for any of these reasons. The panchayat was, therefore, directed to consider within two weeks the application for renewal of licence for the coming year, or any block years, if such an application is received in two weeks.

The company has the obligation to appraise the panchayat that it has licence issued under the Factories Act and clearance from the Pollution Control Board. If the panchayat is satisfied that the company is in possession of these two documents, it should grant licence.

It is not within the jurisdiction of the panchayat to inquire about the details of the machinery installed, borewells etc, as such matters fall within the jurisdiction of the enforcement officer under the Factories Act. After the granting of licence, the panchayat can make inspections so as to see whether any further licence fee is payable. (HC gives nod to Coke's Plachimada plant, IE.B, 08.04.05, L20)

Sustained multiple assaults on environment signal an emerging crisis for Kerala as large areas across the State struggle to cope with rising pollution levels, climate change and increased vulnerability to natural disasters. The first 'State of the Environment' report for Kerala which is scheduled to be released by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, provides an insight into the stress factors responsible for the impending threats.

The report states that unplanned urban growth, conversion of wetlands and fields, coastal erosion and increasing consumption of petroleum products have placed tremendous pressure on the limited natural resources in the State. The report is the culmination of a two-year programme launched by the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE) with assistance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests. (Kerala becoming warmer, says environment survey, Tourism growth posing threat to coastal degradation, T. Nandakumar, TH.B, 05.06.05, L20)

Last week the Perumatty panchayat refused, for a second time, permission to Coca Cola to draw water for its Plachimada plant. As environment stories go, the one about this plant in Kerala is an international favourite that refuses to fade away. The story is one of both ground water depletion and surface pollution that is making the water in wells in the vicinity of the plant undrinkable. Coke says its direct culpability in the matter has not been established.

The plant was closed after the panchayat cancelled the licence of Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd to use groundwater from here in March 2004. The panchayat has since rejected the company's application twice.

The Plachimada protest is led by Dalits and adivasis. The pollution comes from the sludge Coke dumped in the area surrounding its plant which the BBC tested and declared to have a high content of cadmium and nickel. Coke was passing it off as a fertilizer. (The Plachimada saga, Sevanti Ninan, TH.B, 19.06.05, L20)

The Kerala Forest Department would promote a project to develop wooded areas in cities and villages, the Minister for Water Resources and Forests, Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, announced. At a press conference, the Minister said the objective would be to increase the forest cover of the State by 5 percentile points. He said 28 % of the State's territory was forests. This needed to be increased to 33 %. The Minister said that the environmental and other organisations would be involved in the effort to use fallow areas in cities, towns

and villages for planting. Around 20 lakh seedlings would be distributed in the first stage of the afforestation programme. (Project to develop green cover in Kerala cities, TH.B, 29.06.05, L20)

Land grabbing by 'the rich, the powerful and the influential' is continuing unabated in the Cardamom Hill Reserves (CHR) of Idukki district in Kerala, according to a recent report of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court. The CEC submitted its report to the Supreme Court last month acting on an application filed before it by an environmental group called One Earth One Life seeking the court's intervention in preventing large-scale encroachment of forests in the CHR with the support of bureaucrats and establishment.

During their probe, the CEC members came across a staggering number of cases involving "illegal assignment of lands and grant of title deeds... and consequent deforestation" in the CHR, which is legally 'reserved forests.' (Forest encroachment unabated in Idukki, says panel report, P. Venugopal, TH.B, 06.10.05, L20)

Kerala Minister for Water Resources Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan said that the Government would not agree to interlink the Pampa and the Achancoil rivers to the Vypar in Tamil Nadu under any circumstances. The Minister said Kerala had already lost water from five rivers to Tamil Nadu. The Centre had no legal powers to ask the State that it should allow further diversion of its waters. Mr. Radhakrishnan said the Government had, in principle, approved a proposal for the formation of a river development authority. He said his department was of the view that it should have a say in the use of the River Management Fund. The use of the Fund should not be limited to construction works. Conservation of water resources should be the focus. (Kerala not to allow diversion of river waters, TH.B, 03.12.05, L20)

The State Government has proposed shifting the controversial Coca-Cola bottling plant at Perumatty in Palakkad district to some other location where it will not encounter public resistance. The Government made this proposal at a meeting convened by Principal Secretary for Industries T. Balakrishnan. The meeting was part of continuing efforts to find a solution to the dispute over the Coca-Cola bottling plant, which remains closed since March 2004 following public agitation and court cases over the alleged overexploitation of the groundwater resources of the area by the company. According to information received by this newspaper on what transpired at the meeting, the company's officials did not respond either positively or negatively to the suggestion. They said they wanted time to study the proposal from all angles. (Coke reserves response on Government suggestion, TH.B, 04.01.06, L20)

L30 Non-Tourism Issues

It could be a small but significant victory for the green brigade, vindicating years of struggle. As the debate rages whether tribals should be granted residency rights in forests, Kerala could show the way. The Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee in its report said forest land could be transferred if compensated with afforestation programmes. In a report submitted to the SC on April 29, the committee said the State Government can transfer forest land to tribals so that it is used only for forestry. In effect, it has waived the earlier condition of payment of net present value of land by the State Governments.

Kerala has been eagerly waiting for the apex courts decision. After a violent struggle by tribals for their traditional rights, the State government is making efforts to resettle 53,000 tribal families in the forests of Muthanga Sanctuary by transferring nearly 7,000 hectares of forest land. If it comes through, this will be the first victory for tribal rights in the country. (Kerala leads the way in tribal forest rights crusade, Yoga Rangatia, TPD, 03.05.05, L30)

L40 Tourism Policy and Plans

In a series of roadshows Kerala tourism is attempting to tempt the domestic traveller with all things that the tiny state is famous for as well as some virgin, offbeat destinations. Last year foreign arrivals into Kerala stood at 3.25 lakhs while domestic tourists crossed 60 lakhs.

Interview Kerala Tourism Principal Secretary, E V Bharat Bhushan

Q. Kerala is familiar with tourists, so what are you attempting with this campaign?

A. We are taking a different line this time. Our focus is on sustainability because we believe unless tourism can sustain itself; it cannot provide an unforgettable experience.

Q. Aren't the two contradictory?

A. It may seem contradictory our campaign to attract more tourists and the sustainability line but there is no dichotomy. Only if its sustainable can more tourists enjoy the experience. It's challenging but we're gearing for it.

Q. How do you propose to do this?

A. The Kerala Assembly passed a legislation recently providing for demarcating tourist zones, where the government will have wide-ranging control. Such is the scope of the legislation that it lays down stringent guidelines for waste disposal of houseboats and control of emissions.

Q. But why the strong focus on domestic tourists?

A. Because more and more Indians are beginning to travel, and we want them to travel to Kerala. In addition to all the USPs, we are also promoting some of the unexplored territories for those domestic tourists who prefer solitude. The new set of commercials shot by Santosh Sivan aptly convey all that Kerala is about.

(Kerala targets domestic tourists, Anita Rao Kashi, TOI.B, 26.04.05, L40)

Kerala Tourism has prepared a preliminary set of guidelines for the conservation and preservation of the four special tourism zones in the State. The draft guidelines for the conservation and preservation of Kovalam, Munnar, Kumarakom and Fort Kochi are available for comment on the Kerala Tourism Website, said Mr B. Suman, Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala. These four regions were recently declared special tourism zones by the State Government under the Kerala Tourism (Conservation and Preservation of Areas) Act 2005. While preservation, conservation and integrated development of the special tourism zones is the main objective, separate guidelines have been prepared for each zone. (Kerala Tourism prepares draft norms for special zones, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.C, 03.06.05, L40)

Television stars Smriti Irani and Mona Vasu will endorse Kerala as a holiday destination in a series of ads to be telecast on Star Plus. Confirming the development, Kerala Tourism Minister Mr K.C. Venugopal said that the promotion is part of Kerala Tourism's efforts to promote the State in the domestic market. Kerala Tourism also hopes the advertisements will boost visitor inflows during the 'off season' and strengthen the State's positioning as a year-round tourist destination. One advertisement will feature Mona Vasu, who acts in the serial *Miilee*, talk about how ayurvedic holidays in Kerala revitalise her and help her cope with a busy schedule.

According to a senior tourism official, the three-ad campaign will appear on Star Plus in a few weeks. The campaign is part of an overall media package with Star Plus and has been shot by the channel, he said. The main objective of the campaign is to reach out to people in Northern India and also in states such as Gujarat and Maharashtra, said the official. Research has shown that women in these areas have a significant role in determining where the family holidays, he explained. (TV stars to promote Kerala tourism, BL.B, 24.06.05, L40)

Interview with B Suman, Director, Kerala Tourism

Q. With the boom in civil aviation thanks to the arrival of a number of low-cost airlines, has there been an increase in the number of domestic tourists coming to Kerala?

A. As of now there are no low-cost airlines flying into Kerala. However two low cost airlines, Air Deccan and Paramount, are scheduled to fly to Kerala in September. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in the domestic tourist arrivals once they start flying in.

Q. Kerala is right on top of every tourist's itinerary. However, why is that most private airlines are averse to flying to Kerala?

A. Kerala is without doubt the most sought after tourist destination in the country. However, Kerala's geographical location of being located in one corner of the country is to our disadvantage. Currently most of the capacity is filled by business travellers who fly to Kerala due to the high pricing that conventional airlines have at present. The leisure travel segment is quite price-sensitive, unlike the business travel segment. Our disadvantage is that the high pricing to an extent deters leisure travellers from flying in.

Q. High cost is one major factor that puts off domestic tourists. What are your strategies to address this crucial issue?

A. It is agreed that high cost deters domestic tourists. Kerala Tourism is presently looking at a host of policy options, which could be used to incentives airline arrivals into the state. Some of them could be reducing the levels of taxation on ATF, subsidising ground handling charges, etc. A decision on this will have to be taken at a higher level keeping in mind the trade-off between the loss of revenue and anticipated gains in doing so.

(‘High value tourism is intrinsically linked to airline arrivals’, FE.D, 27.09.05, L40)

As Kerala becomes a hot tourist spot for more travellers from Europe, backwaters and ayurveda may not be the only attractions to lure them. The State Tourism Department is planning to promote ‘experience tourism’ which enable the tourists to interact with the locals and enjoy the ambience. The concept brings in additional income for the farmers. The state is targeting high-end tourists with experience tourism. Along with that the Tourism Department is going to unleash a tourism promotional campaign in the US jointly with the Taj and Oberoi groups in March. Unlike Europeans, Kerala has not become must-see place for the Americans. The tourist inflow from the US is still limited. Another trend observed in the current season is the rise in individual tourists. There is less demand for prescheduled and tailor-made programmes. Also the tourists seem more oriented towards culture than beaches, perhaps because at the time of the booking around six months ago, tsunami could have been at the back of their minds. (After backwaters and ayurveda, it's experience tourism in Kerala, P K Krishna Kumar, IE.C, 07.12.05, L40)

Tour operators and travel agents will soon have to shift their base out of the state or just shut shop. The Tourism Department is in the process of transforming its website www.keralatourism.org into a “one stop shop” for all tourism needs. If the idea becomes a reality, a tourist can not only get information on the tourist spots in the state and but also book his flight tickets, arrange his airport transfer, plan his itinerary and even book a seat in a lonely beach-side restaurant through the 20-inch frame of the website. (keralatourism.org in for a major revamp, R Ayyappan, IE.C, 06.02.06, L40)

The Centre has given the green signal to the proposed ‘Kadalora Tourism Circuit’, a tourism project connecting beaches in Kerala, the State Tourism Minister, Mr K.C. Venugopal, said.

In a written reply, he said the Rs 7.98-crore project would be implemented through the Kerala Industrial and Technical Consultancy Organisation in Sankumugham, Cherayi, Nattika, Payyambalam, Meenkunnu and Muzhuppilangad beaches.

Mr Venugopal said though the Government had not received any complaints of sex tourism, it would examine the matter and stern action would be taken against those involved. He said employment opportunities through tourism was increasing each year and according to the report by the Travel and Tourism Council, 7.8 lakh jobs were created during 2005-06 and by 2013 it would touch 22 lakh.

Forest protection: The State Forest Minister, Mr A. Sujanapal, told the Assembly the Government proposed to appoint special prosecutors for speedy settlement of cases related to forest protection. Mr Sujanapal said three projects for forest protection had been implemented with World Bank aid. No outsiders would be engaged for forest protection and this work would be entrusted to tribals living in forest areas. According to available statistics, there were 80,000 tribals living in forests. Mr Sujanapal said not an inch of forest land would be privatised. The State and Central Governments' declared policy was to protect forest. (Centre okays Kerala coastal tourism circuit, BL.B, 15.02.06, L40)

As part of its efforts to promote responsible tourism, Kerala Tourism has unveiled a set of guidelines for travellers and tour operators in the State. The guidelines are part of a multi-pronged strategy to move the tourism industry in Kerala towards responsible tourism based on conservation and preservation.

One aspect of the tourism department's responsible tourism strategy is to work with the hotel industry to promote this concept. In time, ecological considerations will be incorporated into the hotel classification and incentives system currently followed in the State. As part of its responsible tourism strategy, Kerala Tourism also plans to create a certification scheme for tour operators.

Similarly, the tourism department plans to sensitise tourists to the need for responsible tourism through an information campaign. The guidelines, which are posted on the Kerala Tourism Web site, touch on a number of simple but effective things that both tourists and tour operators can do to promote responsible tourism. (Kerala Tourism unveils norms for tourists, operators Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.C, 22.02.06, L40)

Kerala Tourism has drawn up a Rs 5-crore project to develop Veli and Akkulam in the city into important destinations for domestic tourists. The Kerala Tourism Minister Mr. K.G. Venugopal announced this at the inauguration of a new floating restaurant at the Veli tourism village. A section of the walkway from Veli to Akkulam and a renovated project at the Veli tourism village were also inaugurated. Built by the city-based Floatels India Pvt Ltd, the two-storey floating restaurant will be run by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation. (Floating restaurant, BL.B, 24.02.06, L40)

L50 Tourism Issues

Setting itself up as a paradigm for home-spun success, God's Own Country has registered a record number of tourist arrivals. From January to December 2004, domestic tourist arrivals touched a high of 59,75,000, which is more than 1 lakh in comparison with the audited figures of 2003. International arrivals also recorded a growth of 16.69 percent. This would probably have gone up by another 4 to 5 percent had it not been for the tsunami scare, said Kerala Tourism officials. (Kerala registers record tourists, IE.B, 27.04.05, L50)

The Kerala government will steel its claims on Halcyon Castle, but the encroaching M-Far Group (Indian arm of Muscat-based Gulfar Group) is nothing less than an honourable investor; according to Chief Minister Oommen Chandy. The state Cabinet decided to promulgate an ordinance to take over Halcyon Castle. A directive by Kerala High Court had overruled a special order by Kerala government. To strengthen the claims the Cabinet decided to go for an ordinance. In the eye of a legal storm now, Halcyon Castle on Kovalam stands has a historic dazzle that rakes up both the business and the heritage memories. The first recent controversy flare-up was over the token price (reportedly Rs 40 crore) for which ITDC had transferred its beach property to M-Far Group. The adjacent Halcyon Castle, originally a holiday-home for erstwhile royal family of Travancore, is now hotly claimed as part of M-Far Group's buy. (Ordinance to take over Halcyon Castle, FE.B, 05.05.05, L50)

Kerala ayurveda is desperately searching for a good vaidya to cure it of all sedimented ills. This branch of medicine is on a slippery slope towards losing all its traditional respect and reputé after being pestled to thrash in the tourism mortar. The first signs of its fast-losing value are already visible with many international tour agencies writing to the Kerala Government about mounting complaints against quacks and rank amateurs who masquerade as professional masseurs.

In fact, a sampling of feedback books in resorts and houseboats reflects how allergic the backpackers are towards this which automatically found space on all billboards luring foreign travellers. With no monitoring mechanism in place, capsule ayurvedic packages are today seen as nightmarish experiences which scare visitors.

The government has already prepared a draft Bill to tame mushrooming massage and ayurveda centres. All centres will be inspected by a team of experts from Health and Tourism Departments before they are accorded 'A,' 'B' or 'C' certificates. Sources said the draft Bill would be tabled in the Assembly in the next session for adoption. (Kerala ayurveda on a slippery slope; scares tourists, IE.C, 14.06.05, L50)

Foreigners visiting Fort Kochi in the near future would have help coming in the form of tourist-friendly autorickshaws driven by women. Spurred by the increasing incidents of misbehaviour and fleecing of foreign tourists by a section of auto drivers, the Fort Cochin Tourist Home Owners Association is planning to operate rickshaws that would charge only a reasonable fare. The women drivers, of these vehicles would also double up as guides and provide tourists the information they require. The Tourist Home Owners Association, which has around 35 members, was formed to serve the interest of sustainable tourism in Fort Kochi. The other objectives of the association include preserving Fort Kochi as a heritage zone and keeping it clean. (Soon, tourist-friendly autos in Kochi, IE.C, 25.06.05, L50)

The participants at a seminar on 'Cochin Port - A New Direction' organised by the Cochin Chamber of Commerce and Industry suggested converting the Willingdon Island into a city centre of Kochi with facilities for recreation and shopping. To push this proposal ahead, the chamber has decided to request the Union Government to set up an empowered taskforce to study the issue and provide with land use recommendation to attract long-term investments. The taskforce can have representatives from the Ministry of Shipping, the Kerala Government, the port and from trade and commerce, the chamber said. (Plea to convert Willingdon Island into Kochi centre, BL.B, 13.09.05, L50)

After ayurveda tourism and backwater tourism, Kerala tourism is set to launch its farm tourism product. The project catapults any farmer with 10 acres cultivated land holding to the tourism industry's ambit.

Coffee and tea plantations, going through deep gloom because of WTO-driven market depression, will also be allowed to spread their investment through plantation tourism. The state government would give subsidy support equivalent to 25% of the amount the farmer invests in hospitality facilities. This amount will be upto Rs 5 lakh. Kerala Tourism is also working out a credit package with bankers to make loans available for the farm tourism facility.

In return for subsidy and loan support, the farmer is expected to create a minimum hospitality infrastructure, conforming to Kerala Tourism standards. A farm-tourism domain, according to the scheme, should include a drawing room facility, small restaurant, and small shopping area, parking area and roads with rural ambience, all within the farm land. There should also be guide-arrangement to give details of planting methods of the crop in cultivation, specialities of the crop variants and harvesting techniques. (Farmers to get a bite of Kerala tourism pie by Jan, FE.C, 24.10.05, L50)

Kerala Tourism is working on an initiative to give a boost to medical tourism in the State. According to Mr B. Suman, Director of the State's Department of Tourism, the availability of high-quality healthcare infrastructure at reasonable prices makes Kerala an ideal destination for medical tourism. Kerala Tourism is working on a marketing campaign to promote the State as a medical tourism destination. On the anvil are promotional events in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Europe and in West Asia. The tourism department is also working on creating partnerships between hospitals in Kerala and insurance companies in Europe, especially in the UK. (Move to boost medical tourism in Kerala, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.B, 10.12.05, L50)

With the onset of Kerala brand of Ayurveda and newly found cruise tourism, the state has been surging ahead by establishing a niche for itself in the global tourism map. Blending the cruise and ayurveda tourism potentials of Kerala, Ayurvoyages Pvt. Ltd is venturing into a lonesome path by setting on sail Ayur Nauka. Ayur Nauka is a unique concept in health tourism, conceived by the Thrissur based Ayuryogashram. It is a floating health care centre offering tourists a plethora of facilities for a blissful cruise in the backwaters with the accompaniment of ayurvedic rejuvenation therapy. (A blend of cruise and ayurveda, IE.C, 29.12.05, L50)

Kochi-based Highway Garden Pvt Ltd has embarked on having properties in the major tourism destinations like Thekkady, Wayanad, Kumarakkom, Alappuzha and Kannur in a year and a half. Company director KE Roy said in most places the sites had been identified and negotiations were in the final stages. The group was setting up a four-star business hotel at an investment of Rs 15 crore in Thiruvananthapuram. The group has a resort in Munnar called 'Forest Haven'. It had pumped in Rs 3 crore to renovate and upgrade its Highway Garden to a three-star hotel. (Highway Garden to acquire new asset for tourism circuit, FE.C, 07.01.06, L50)

Jose Dominic, managing director of Kerala-based CGH Earth group of resorts said, "The demographics of the international traveller are undergoing a noticeable change. The top end of the market is getting more involved with the local community at their destination. The new crop of travellers is thus setting a trend of responsible travelling, trying to learn more about the society around and seeking more fulfilment from their holiday rather than just heading for some beach. The pronounced shift towards such responsible tourism seems to have caught on with a number of tour operators, travel agents and even the state government."

Perhaps the most significant of the ventures aimed at tourism promotion with an emphasis on community development is the Lullaby-at-Varkala project, a venture launched by leading tour and travel sector player Kerala Travels by promoting Pro-Child, an NGO that works towards empowering the children of an entire area in Varkala. The project covers seven panchayats, one municipality and 140 anganwadis in Varkala, an emerging beach destination in Kerala and is empowering not only the 3,320 children attending the anganwadis, but even the women in families around them. (Tourists cost up to Kerala vibes, Joe A Scaria, ETC, 25.01.06, L50)

Kerala has become one of the three finalists in the Destination Category for the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards 2006 instituted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Kerala made it to the list along with Greece and Mexico from out of 100 applicants from more than 30 countries, a spokesman for Kerala Tourism said. The award will recognise 'the dedication and success in maintaining a policy of sustainable management incorporating social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects of the destination.' In the next stage, an on-site evaluation process will be carried out to select the number one destination. A WTTC representative is currently in the State to assess the properties firsthand and meet with managers, staff, community representatives and others involved in the project. Based on this, a final report will be made to the judging committee. (Kerala makes it to the final list for WTTC award, BL.B, 06.02.06, L50)

In Kochi, the main business and tourism hub of the state, leading builders started off the concept of service apartments – a concept widely endorsed by the tourism circuit. However, apartments are now being uttered not just by builders but even by the ordinary investing public. In fact, for the Non Resident Keralites (NRK's), who booked apartments in Kochi, the service apartments have opened up a new income stream. Today, Kochi has some of the best service apartments like The Riviera Suites, Star Homes, and Mermaid Days Inn. Many less known apartments are also being offered in the city to the business and leisure travellers. The concept has been so widely accepted that even some of the tour operators have started offering service apartments. Some hotels are also tying up with apartment owners in prime localities to provide accommodation for their customers. (Apartments at your service, Tharun Kumar, TOI.B, 03.03.06, L50)

Kerala received 'best tourism state' award while the 'best hotel' awards were bagged by Oberoi's Amarvilla in Agra and the Taj Residency in Bangalore. Besides winning the best performing tourist state award for outstanding achievements in the tourism sector, Kerala also won 'best maintained tourism friendly monuments' award for its Sakthan Thampuran palace. (Kerala receives best tourism state award, FE.B, 18.03.06, L50)

L51 Coastal Tourism

The largest private yacht with over 100 custom-designed residences and amenities of a luxury resort on board, The World, has anchored at Kochi Port. The vessel, arrived for the first time in India, will spend three-days at Kochi before leaving for Goa and Mumbai. Travel Corporation of India, the travel agents for passengers on board, has arranged sightseeing tours, backwater cruises and village visits for them.

Conceived by a member of a Norwegian maritime family, The World is the only resort community circumnavigating the globe. You can either own a home on board the vessel or enjoy a vacation at sea by renting an apartment, provided your pockets are deep enough. (The World anchors at Kochi, BL.B, 02.04.05, L51)

The Kerala Cabinet has sanctioned Rs 4.31 crore for construction of seawalls to protect people affected by the recent swell waves on the coastal areas. The Chief Minister said that the people living on the coast of 9 districts had been affected by the waves. Mr Chandy said that a forest station and police aid post would be set up at Kadavari Valsapetty to prevent ganja cultivation. As the area was inaccessible, concrete footpaths and steps would be built. (Kerala Govt sanctions Rs 4.31 cr to build seawalls, Irrigation Department entrusted with the task, BL.B, 26.05.05, L51)

An ocean park will be set up at Muzhipilangad, known as 'drive-in-beach', to give a boost to the integrated tourism development in the North Malabar region. The Tourism Department had already submitted a detailed project report on Ocean Park with an estimated cost of Rs 1 crore to the State Government for its approval. A detailed survey for the setting up of aquarium, maritime museum, children's park, water sports and a mini oceanarium was also conducted. Mr Ravindran said the ocean park in the Muzbipilangad-Dharmadom area would be a major development, bringing socio-economic changes through integrated tourism development in the area. Muzhipilangad, a consolidated beach which is motorable even in the severe monsoon months, attracts a large number of tourists. A 4-km drive along the beach is an enthralling experience. (Ocean park mooted in Kannur, BL.B, 11.07.05, L51)

L51a Backwater Tourism

To cater to the increasing number of the tourists visiting Kumarakom and near-by tourism spots, Lakeview House Boats has launched a houseboat named 'Palazhi' with three-star facilities. The 6-hour Kumarakom - Alappuzha cruise provides food, including buffet lunch. The cost of the trip is Rs 650 a person. This is the first time that a luxury cruise boat has been launched exclusively to promote lake tourism with daily trips to tourists spots in the Kumarakom - Alappuzha belt, said Mr Sreekumar, Managing Director of Lake View House Boats. (Luxury boat launched, BL.B, 28.10.05, L51a)

Kumarakom is once again witnessing a heavy inflow of tourists, mainly from France, Switzerland, Germany and Russia. In Coconut Lagoon, there is unusual rush as they could not even offer luxury suits to those who have not made any advance reservation. For pool villa and standard bungalow they charge Rs 27,000 and Rs 17,000 respectively. Kumarakom Lake Resort is charging Rs 9,500 exclusive of tax for standard accommodation. But for luxury suits they charge up to Rs 35,000. There are also resorts that charge Rs 50,000, inclusive of food, for a single day accommodation. The tourists who do not get accommodation are spending the day and night in houseboats provided by the resorts. A day's rent for houseboats ranges from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 25,000. Some are complaining about the exorbitant rates charged by leading resorts. They even described it as 'exploitation' and asked, "How many Indians could pay such rates?" (Foreigners crowd Kumarakom, Aravindan, BL.C, 28.11.05, L51a)

L52 Pilgrim Tourism

As part of its efforts to improve infrastructure in tourist destinations in the State, Kerala Tourism is chalking out a plan to upgrade facilities at important pilgrim spots. The tourism department, in association with the temple, mosque or church management, will implement this scheme to improve basic amenities at pilgrimage centres. District level committees will supervise the operation and maintenance of the facilities set up under this scheme.

Meanwhile, the tourism department has invited applications from private entrepreneurs for its 'Vazhiyoram' project to provide basic amenities for travellers along important highways in the State. According to the guidelines of this scheme, 250 Vazhiyoram units will be set up across Kerala at an estimated Rs 61 crore. Of the total investment, the State Government will contribute Rs 13 crore, while the private sector is expected to invest the remaining Rs 48 crore. Each 'Vazhiyoram' unit will have a range of facilities and services such as, restaurant, toilets, telephone booths, souvenir shops and ATMs. The units will be set up according to design specifications provided by the Department of Tourism. (Kerala Tourism draws plan to upgrade pilgrim spots, BL.B, 09.06.05, L52)

L52a Sabarimala

The Union Government has approved the release of 12.675 hectares of forestland for development of the Sabarimala hill shrine. The Kerala Tourism and Devaswom Minister, Mr K C Venugopal, said the Supreme

Court would have to approve the release of forestland. The release of forestland will provide a boost to the development of Sabarimala. It will also help launch various activities connected with the Pamba Action Plan, he said. All development initiatives at Sabarimala will be carried out as per eco-friendly norms contained in the master plan prepared for the region. (Centre okays allotment of forestland for Sabarimala, BL.B, 24.05.05, L52a)

More facilities will be provided for Sabarimala pilgrims this year in the land made available for the purpose at Nilakkal. A high-level meeting convened by Chief Minister Oommen Chandy to review the arrangements being made for the pilgrims during the coming season decided to provide electricity connection to Nilakkal using underground cable, dig three bore wells and ponds to provide drinking water, construct 400 new toilets and renovate the old ones and construct parking for 10,000 vehicles. Fifty cents of land at Nilakkal would be made available to the Ayyappa Seva Sangham for its activities as part of the Master Plan. (More facilities for Sabarimala pilgrims, TH.B, 14.10.05, L52a)

Hoteliers, snack stall owners and instant coffee vendors at Sannidhanam and Pampa are fleecing the pilgrims to the Lord Ayyappa temple in a big way. Often they hike the prices of coffee, tea and food items by 50 percent. They charge Rs 7 for a cup of coffee and Rs 6 for a cup tea at Sannidhanam though the district administration allows them to charge only Rs 6 and Rs 5 respectively. Though the hotels/shop-owners are required to show the price list for the convenience of the pilgrims, most of them are not adhering to the rule. The exploitation by hotels between Laha and Vadasserikara is worse. (Hoteliers in Sabarimala fleecing the pilgrims, IE.C, 20.11.05, L52a)

L54 Culture Tourism

The Guruvayoor Temple, India's second-richest shrine after Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam has revoked the new dress code it introduced last month following pressure from devotees. Temple rules introduced in April said that for security reasons, men would have to enter the sanctum without their shirts. Earlier, male devotees were allowed to take off their shirts and sling it over their shoulders. Another temple order banning children above the age of five from wearing short pants has also been withdrawn after protests from devotees. Though female devotees have been demanding the right to wear dresses of their choice, the temple authorities continue to insist that they either wear saris or pavadas (long skirts) within the complex. Pilgrims from other parts of the country have registered complaints about the uncomfortable dress code for women, but for the moment, the status quo remains. (Temple revokes dress code, TP.D, 13.05.05, L54)

Cultural and environmental tourism are the new growth areas globally, and Kerala is well positioned to capitalize on this trend, said Ms Jenny Shipley, former Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Ms Shipley, who visited Kerala, recently, told that tourists today look for authentic experiences that help them understand the culture and lifestyles of different nations. This is a great thing, even in foreign policy terms, as it enhances global understanding. So, instead of trying to be like other tourist destinations, Kerala should look at highlighting what makes it different. ('Kerala must promote cultural, eco tourism', Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.B, 12.07.05, L54/ L55)

L55 Eco and Wildlife Tourism

The Kerala's eco tourism department will soon start work on a new project at Chadayamangalam in Kollam district. Called the 'Jadayu Para Development Project', the venture takes its name from a huge rock formation. In keeping with the rock-strewn nature of the project zone, the plan is to develop it with 'rocks' as the main theme. At the same time, Jadayu Para will also be an eco-friendly tourist destination. The total investment in the project is expected to be Rs 2.5 crore.

The eco-tourism department will design a series of activities that highlight the natural features of the rock formation; walkways that take visitors to the top of the rock and overnight stay in tents will be a part of this experience. Simultaneously, the eco-tourism department will develop Jadayu Para as a picnic spot. Also on the cards is a proposal to develop a traditional rural marketplace within the Jadayu Para project area. (Eco-tourism project for Chadayamangalam, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.B, 06.05.05, L55)

Over the past few years, eco-tourism has become a key focus area for Kerala's tourism authorities. The eco-tourism wing of the Department of Tourism has identified 56 places in the State that have the potential to be developed as eco-tourism centres. While six of these sites are already functional eco-tourism projects, work on another 10 projects has been started.

All these projects are being implemented with participation from the local community and the forest department. Another unique eco-tourism project currently being implemented is at Konni in the State's Pathanamthitta district. Inspired by the region's association with elephants and elephant-related folklore, the Konni eco-tourism project focuses on elephants. When completed, this project is expected to include an elephant museum, elephant rides and visits to a training camp for elephants. (56 sites identified for eco-tourism in Kerala, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.B, 26.12.05, L55)

The Kerala Government has given its nod for setting up Periyar River Authority so as to conduct regular monitoring and suggest measures to improve the quality of the river. The authority, which was constituted considering the suggestions from the Periyar Action Plan, will initiate steps to formulate action plans on areas such as afforestation, rehabilitation and resettlement, survey of river basins, pollution monitoring centres, and sewage treatment plants, provision of septic tanks and installation of slaughter houses. It will also carry out research on the ecological status of the river periodically and will coordinate the activities of various government departments, NGOs, and other organisations involved in river protection. The authority will carry out maintenance of embankments and will suggest measures for the improvement of the riverbanks. A comprehensive action plan for protecting the river will be evolved. Action plans on eco-tourism and inland navigation, prevention of salinity incursion, watershed management and awareness programmes will also be prepared as part of protecting the rivers. (Kerala Govt approves proposal to set up Periyar river authority, BL.C, 16.02.06, L55)

L57 Hill Tourism

Munnar, Kerala's premier hill resort may be widely acclaimed for its salubrious climate and scenic tea plantations but certainly not for its squalor. Regarded as one of the cleanest hill-stations in the country until the mid-1970s, today this tourist hotspot could well figure at bottom of the list. Surprisingly, few seem concerned about the town's squalor. Instead everyone is preoccupied with exploiting its tourism boom. So vital basics like cleanliness and hygiene take a back seat. Garbage is mindlessly strewn everywhere. Plastic cups, plates, bottles and bags litter the town and its environs which is, ironically enough, a plastic-free zone. The market is an eyesore. Cluttered up and filthy, it's invariably littered with trash. There's degeneration everywhere. A local NGO does valiantly strive to set matters right, but its influence is limited. Thus the widespread damage to the town's environment goes largely unchecked. One wonders whether Munnar is trying to attract or repel tourists — its undoubted mainstay. (Hills go downhill, IE.D, 03.03.06, L57)

L58 Special Tourism Area

Despite initial hitches, the Bekal tourism project in Kasaragod district has gained momentum with a UAE-based hotel group starting work on a sea-facing resort. Though the Leela Palaces and Resorts has backtracked from the project citing infrastructure reasons, the ambitious project is to develop a chain of resorts at the famed beach destination in north Kerala is back on rails.

The two plots that had been allotted to the Leela Group had already been taken back from them and given to other hotel groups for development, the Bekal Resorts Development Corporation (BRDC) Managing Director, Mr P K. Kesavan, said. He said the UAE-based Holiday Group of Hotels, which was allotted 32 acres of land at Chembarika village, has started the layout and beautification work at the site. (Bekal tourism project gains momentum, BL.B, 11.07.05, L58)

■ M – TAMIL NADU ■

M11 Planning

The Tamil Nadu Government unveiled in the Assembly, a policy aimed at reducing the negative impact of all kinds of disasters through 'vibrant disaster management machinery'.

The policy envisages convergence of disaster management and development planning. Comprehensive disaster management plans will be formulated at all levels after taking into account the local conditions. The focus will be on reducing the vulnerability of communities instead of merely providing disaster relief. The need for the policy was felt, as the State has been prone to cyclones and drought. In December, a tsunami hit the coastal districts.

In the traditional system, such activities are undertaken in a phased sequence plan. But the new model calls for a continuous process. The management will be done in three phases — pre-disaster, impact phase and post-disaster phase. A Disaster Management Authority (DMA), is to be established by the Government, will be the nodal agency to guide, facilitate, coordinate and monitor various aspects of disaster management. (State Government unveils plan to mitigate disasters, TH.B, 07.04.05, M11)

M20 Environmental Issues

The State Government will raise mangrove forests and bio-shields in coastal districts at a total cost of Rs 8 crore, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa told the State Assembly. During the debate on demands for grants for Forest and Environment Department, Jayalalitha said the mangrove forests would be raised in Thiruvallur, Cuddalore, Nagappattinam and Ramanathapuram districts in an area of 1,000 acres at a cost of Rs 1 crore and the bio-shield would come up at a cost of Rs 7 crore in 5,000 acres of land in Chennai, Thiruvallur, Kancheepuram, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Nagappattinam, Thiruvallur, Thanjavur, Pudukottai, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Thirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts. (TN to grow mangroves, bio-shields, IE.B, 05.04.05, M20)

The Rs.2,000-crore Sethu Samudhram Ship Canal Project, off the Tamil Nadu coast, can now be put on the fast track as the Union Environment and Forests Ministry has given it "environmental clearance" under the Environmental (Impact) Assessment Notification, 1994. However the project must comply with 22 specific conditions and 19 general conditions. If everything goes well, the country's long-pending dream project slated to operate ship services to a distance of 167.22 km. in the Gulf of Mannar, will be completed in four years. (Sethu project gets green signal; It is subject to compliance of 22 specific conditions, J Balaji, IE.B, 07.04.05, M20)

Tigers in Tamil Nadu are safer than in most other States, according to the Tiger Taskforce, which is investigating the status of the big cat in Indian forests. The "innovative practices" adopted by the State such as recruiting ex-poachers as forest guards augured well for the tiger, said Sunita Narain, Director, Centre for Science and Environment, who is chairman of the taskforce. 'Out of 114 tiger deaths in the country between 1999 and 2003, only 5 were from Tamil Nadu. Also, out of 211 seizures of tiger parts made by law-enforcing agencies in this period, only 4 were from Tamil Nadu. Some of the approaches adopted by Tamil Nadu needs to be explored by other States. "Experts pointed out how excluding local communities in forest management and wildlife conservation affected the gathering of intelligence and information, critical to preventing poaching," she said. Wildlife managers in the State see the taskforce's commendation as a vindication of their decade's long campaign to include tribals in conservation efforts. "The eco-development programme we put together in the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve was hailed by the World Bank as one of the best in the world. We have been able to bring down the felling of trees for firewood by 95 % and grazing by 70 %. Nearly 70 % of the beneficiaries of the programme are women. Tribals have thus been given a participatory role in forest management," Dr. Sukhdev, Chief Wildlife Warden, said. (If you're a big cat, you're better off in Tamil Nadu, Vani Doraisamy, TH.D, 21.05.05, M20)

The Central Government decision to appoint an eight-member committee to study the environment impact of the Sethusamudram canal and advise the authorities periodically is a step in the right direction, given the apprehensions expressed in several quarters about the project. Dredging for the canal will be undertaken between the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, and the Centre has acknowledged that the area is highly eco-sensitive, with many forms of marine life and coral reef. Environmentalists say the waters around Adam's Bridge are home to one of the world's richest biosphere reserves, with 3600 types of marine life, including about 400 endangered species. There has already been a controversy about the project getting hasty environmental clearance from the Union Environment Ministry, bypassing the Tamil Nadu government. There have also been suggestions that there are deficiencies in the report of the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI). Late last month Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalithaa expressed fears that the project might affect the livelihood of fishermen because of the dredging.

With the project facing major controversies even before it takes off, it is quite likely that these will continue to dog the canal even after it opens. Fishermen have been quite concerned about the impact of the canal. They say that the project will provide jobs to only 5,000 persons, while 3.5 lakh fishermen will lose their livelihood.

Environmental activists have been goading fishermen to agitate against the project, and here again how much of the doomsday scenario will come through is a big question mark. The social and environment costs of big dam projects have been found to be far higher than the benefits they provided. The Sethusamudram canal should not go the same way. (Sethu project fears, Centre appoints panel to study impact, IE.B, 12.07.05, M20)

The government has said that Sri Lanka's concern about the environmental problems arising out of the Sethusamudram channel project are unfounded. Top shipping ministry officials said that the project had been approved after going through all the pros and cons related to the environmental issues and long-term repercussions. Last week the Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar had mentioned during a discussion on the project that it may consider taking India to international court if the environmental issues related to the project are not solved. As the project involves dredging and setting up of other facilities through an eco-sensitive zone, the ministry has constituted a monitoring committee to assess the impact of environment and suitably advise the project authorities. The officials said that Lanka's main concerns are related to its coastline, coral reef and fishing activities. Also, the island nation feels that its neighbouring territory would be inundated if the project is implemented. However, sources say that in fact, if the project is not implemented, then there are more chances of Sri Lanka's territory getting inundated. (Sethusamudram project: India terms Lanka's concern baseless, Animesh Singh, FE.B, 15.07.05, M20)

M30 Non-tourism Issues

For the first time in Tamil Nadu, the Self-Help Groups (SHGs), mostly from the tribal communities, are being brought under one umbrella for a novel and innovative programme to protect the Pachamalai forests, where illegal tree felling has been rampant. When the forest cover deteriorated all over the country due to various factors, the government had introduced many schemes to encourage the locals from protecting the forest area. Several afforestation projects of the Department of Forests in Tamil Nadu introduced in the past had fetched results today. The state average of forest cover of around 25 % is well above the national average of 16-17 percent. District Forest Officer K V Giridhar said, realising that people's participation was essential for the success of any project; people have been involved in forest management in some way or the other from the time of implementing social forestry schemes. (SHGs converge to protect Pachamalai forest, L Srikrishna, IE.C, 29.03.05, M30)

M40 Tourism Policy and Plans

Destination development of eco-tourism spots, upgrading infrastructure and implementation of Phase-II integrated Mamallapuram development are the areas of focus for the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC). On destination development in Yercaud, Shaktikanta Das, TTDC Managing Director said that work on desilting of the lake, improvement of the surroundings including landscaping and illumination and provision of public conveniences would be done at a cost of Rs. 4.48 crores. This year the Point Calimere wildlife sanctuary, Muthupet, and Pichavaram would be the spots for destination development works being carried out in Nagapattinam, Thiruvavur and Cuddalore districts. (TTDC focus on destination tourism, T.S. Shankar TH.C, 20.04.05, M40)

With 126 development works having been completed in the past three years on an outlay of Rs. 2.48 crores, Courtallam, which will attract tourists from various parts of the country during the next three months, is all set to add few more facilities for its guests at the cost of Rs. 1.04 crores before the season starts this year. While the Department of Tourism has agreed to allocate Rs. 41 lakhs, the Courtallam special panchayat, the richest among the special panchayats in the district, will give Rs. 36 lakhs. (Courtallam ready to receive guests with more facilities, 126 development works have been completed in the past three years, P. Sudhakar, TH.C, 04.06.05, M40)

In an attempt to boost tourism, the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation is marketing the state as an all season destination, through a campaign titled Enchanting Tamil Nadu, Experience Yourself. The state which is known for its towering temples, historic forts and beaches, is promoting relatively lesser known regions like Tranquebar, Pulicat and Chettinad. Besides that, Tamil Nadu's gateway Chennai and Coimbatore will be upgraded to conduct world class conferences backed by better roadways. Health tourism too will be given a boost.

The average length of stay of tourists has been 2.1 days and last year, the tourist arrivals were 300,76,832. It has attracted an investment of Rs 7,725 crores directly or indirectly."

It has been found that 23 % of foreign tourists stay at star hotels, and now attempts are on to recognise guest houses for tourists. Statistics indicate that there were 10.58 lakhs foreign tourists last year. (TN set for a tourism boost, AA.B, 31.08.05, M40)

Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa said the State Government proposed to promote 'twinning of destinations' by "closely synergising our efforts with neighbouring countries and states, and developing common circuits." Pointing out that this was one of the 7-point plan that the state had for promoting tourism, she said that Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka were today emerging as twin destinations for a large number of visitors from Europe and elsewhere. (TN, Lanka emerging as twin tourist spots, IE.C, 16.10.05, M40)

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Department has decided to launch Adi Sankara and Jain temples circuits to attract more tourists, particularly the domestic ones, State tourism Secretary V Varaprasad Rao said. A 'Vivekananda tourism circuit' would also be introduced within the next couple of months, he added. He said while Rs 4.3 crore has been allocated for developing amenities for the 'Adi Sankara' circuit, upto Rs 3 crore has been allocated for the Jain tourism circuit. Private sector should participate in a big way to develop these three circuits. (Adi Sankara, Jain temple circuits in TN on cards, FE.B, 28.01.06, M40)

M50 Tourism Issues

Ramanathapuram district, which, until a few years ago, remained a hazy grey patch on the tourist map of Tamil Nadu, is now emerging as a favoured destination for both foreign and local tourists. This, in addition to the thousands of pilgrims who visit this district everyday to offer worship at the various well-known shrines of all faiths. In order to attract tourists, the government has unfolded a number of projects, which is fast changing the profile of this district. A number of parks and entertainment centres now dot the long coast of the district. (Ramnad fast emerging as favoured tourist spot, S Raja, IE.C, 16.10.05, M50)

Quality infrastructure, a vibrant hospitality industry and easy connectivity with exotic tourist spots make Chennai an increasingly favourite destination for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions). The numbers of international conferences, each of which are attended by at least 2,000 to 5,000 delegates, have gone up over the years. With the season already on, several international groups have written to major hotels and hospitality agencies, handling MICE, confirming dates to host conferences. Hi Tours, an agency which handles MICE, has received the intimation to arrange for conferences as late as 2007. And the trend is considered a good sign at a time when the tourism boards of Sri Lanka and South-East Asian countries are aggressively marketing their home countries for MICE. (Chennai emerges as a hot spot for MICE, V Ayyappan, IE.C, 21.11.05, M50)

The temple town of Bhadrachalam could soon offer you this rare mix of a purifying pilgrimage and a soothing tourism experience. A five-acre Ramayana Theme Park, the new-look Parnasala, boating to Papi Hills and packaged tours are in the offing. All these initiatives are a result of the recent visit of the Central Tourism

Department officials to the temple town. The team proposed a Rs 14-crore package for actualising the tourism potential of Bhadrachalam, with Rs 8 crore in the first phase. (Spiritual tourism at Bhadrachalam, B Satyanarayana Reddy, IE.C, 18.12.05, M50)

For the hospitality majors such as Indian Hotels Company Ltd, Hotel Leelaventure, Hilton, Marriott and others, Chennai is fast becoming a hot spot. After lying low for over the years, Chennai is suddenly turning to be the most happening city in India as compared to Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune. With view to cashing in on the expected gap in demand and supply thanks to increasing business activities in both manufacturing and services sectors, and also major investment proposals from both multinational and domestic companies coupled with encouraging average room rate, hospitality majors are vying for a big pie in the major southern metro, according to industry sources. "There is going to be an addition of over 1,000 rooms in the next 2-3 years with an estimated investment of over Rs 1,000 crore," said a senior official of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI). (Hotel majors firm up Chennai plans, R Ravichandran, FE.B, 03.01.06, M50)

M51 Coastal Tourism

The recently-opened beach park at Mandapam, has turned out to be a top tourist attraction of Rameswaram, thanks to its design and location. The park was established at a cost of Rs. 24.30 lakhs on 40 acres of land belonging to the Mandapam Special Village Panchayat. It was designed to meet the expectations of tourists, who were often disappointed over the inadequate tourist spots at Rameswaram. The major attraction at the park is the children's swimming pool, just 50 metres off the sea. An added attraction is the glass-bottom boats operated by the Forest department, which gives a sight of the coral reef formations underwater. (Mandapam Beach Park a hit with tourists, TH.B, 17.05.05, M51)

Tourist destinations in Kanyakumari will get a facelift. A total of Rs 14.82 crore is being spent for tourism promotion activities such as providing new infrastructure, renovation work and providing for more facilities in various tourism centres in Kanyakumari district. Detailing the various ongoing tourism promotion activities in the district, the Collector said a total of Rs 25 lakh is being spent to provide wayside amenities such as landscaping, gardening and new pathways to the beach at Vattakottai in Kanyakumari, where the circular fort is situated. A parking lot is being developed at the sunset point at Kanyakumari by the PWD at a cost of Rs 1 crore. A Tourism Reception Centre at Kanyakumari is being built at a cost of Rs 60 lakh, Paliwal said. Flood lighting at Vivekananda Rock by Central PWD is being provided at a cost of Rs 32.13 lakh while the 'Sound and Light Show' on Swami Vivekananda is being setup at a cost of 2.25 crore. Indian Tourism Development Corporation has taken up promotion works at a cost of Rs 2.55 crore for developing five cottages, in open air theatre, Vivekananda Rock jetty improvement works, generator installation and sunset point development at Kanyakumari. Muttom Beach and Thekkuruchi beach are being developed at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore. (Multi-crore plan to develop tourism in Kanyakumari, IE.C, 05.07.05, M51)

M53 Heritage Tourism

The Nilgiri Mountain Railway which connects Mettupalayam (326 metres) to Ooty (2,203 metres), is now a world heritage site for its outstanding contribution to keeping steam heritage tourism alive. This was decided by UNESCO's world heritage committee in Durban. The UNESCO inscription is an extension of the earlier nomination of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway as a heritage site. NMR, along with Darjeeling rail, is now part of UNESCO's Mountain Railways of India. (Nilgiri rail chugs its way into UNESCO heritage list, TOI.B, 17.07.05, M53)

Arikamedu - an archaeological site, which serves an index for South Indian History will soon be developed into a heritage tourist spot with the aid of HUDCO, said Dr. T. Sathyamurthy, superintendent, Chennai Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). HUDCO, which had been entrusted with the task of beautifying the site, had earlier evolved a blue print for the project and was all set to take it up for implementation during last year itself. But, it was delayed due to tsunami and there were also apprehensions that a portion of the site was damaged. But, it was later found out that there was no damage to the site. The project would be implemented in January: tourists would be able to reach Arikamedu along the Arianakuppam River through a boat from Arianakuppam. (Arikamedu to be made heritage spot, IE.C, 17.10.05, M53)

M57 Hill Tourism

With the tea industry facing a crisis for the past few years, Valparai town in the Anamalais is pinning its hopes on tourism. Thousands of estate workers have started moving to the plains and business activities have hit an all-time low. The town does not have much private land for construction of hotels and other commercial establishments. Most of the land has been leased out to private estates while the rest is a reserve forest. The municipality has sent a proposal for building 100 resorts and a children's park on the banks of the proposed check-dam across the Nallakathudai, a jungle stream.

Once tourists start coming, tea sale will go up, benefiting the estates, says Hameed, an AIADMK functionary. However, environmental activists are cautious. "Already it has been opened up for tourism. Regulated tourism is all right that too, for wildlife enthusiasts and nature lovers. Mass tourism will be hazardous to this fragile place," says an activist. The poor, especially the estate workers, will be affected as the cost of living will go up once tourist flow increases, says another. (Valparai pinning hopes on tourism, M. Gunasekaran, TH.C, 19.10.05, M57)

M57b Kodaikanal

The salubrious, 24-hectare Kodaikanal Lake would tempt anybody to take the plunge without a thought. But appearances can be deceptive, as is sadly the case with the lake. Things have deteriorated to the extent that visitors thronging lodges or cottages may be susceptible to both water-borne and skin diseases if these establishments happen to use water from the lake for drinking or other purposes.

According to a report prepared by the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board, the lake is dying a slow death. A sample test conducted by its water analysis laboratory recently revealed that the lake water has been contaminated to a great extent. The level of e-coli bacteria, responsible for causing diarrhoea and urinary tract infection, was found to be 1,100 times higher than the limit stipulated by the Central Public Health Engineering Environmental Organisation. The level of faecal streptococcus, that causes amoebic dysentery, was found to be 230 per 100 ml of water as against 'nil' specified examination of the water revealed that the turbidity units and ferrous content exceeded the maximum permissible limit of 10 units and 1 mg per litre respectively.

Environmentalists are putting the blame on sewage released into the lake by some hotels and lodges. A Boat Club member alleges that the water is being illegally tapped and supplied to some unlicensed lodges using tankers. An official of the Kodai Municipal Council reveals that water tankers transporting water from the lake were seized at night a few days ago, admits Municipal Chairman Kurien Abraham, 'Unlicensed hotels indulging in these illegal activities bring a bad name to the good establishments, too. The municipal administration has issued notices to these lodges and hotels.' Abraham points out that the lake de-weeding and de-silting project, for which Rs 10.33 crore had been sanctioned, if implemented, can provide a solution to the contamination problem. "But a local forum has obtained stay from court." (Contamination killing Kodai Lake, A R Meyyammai, IE.C, 05.05.05, M57b)

M58 Special Tourism Areas

Two more temples have been discovered in Mahabalipuram by the Archaeological Survey of India during excavation. Also, underwater exploration has indicated that there may be more man-made structures (presumably temples) submerged under the sea. Though there is excitement of realizing the existence of legendary 'seven pagodas', the ASI is bound by a resource crunch. ASI Director General C Babu Rajeev said that the ASI proposed to strengthen tourist facilities at Mahabalipuram. (More temples discovered in Mahabalipuram, Swati Das, TOI.M, 02.04.05, M58)

■ N – ANDHRA PRADESH ■

Policy and Planning

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry has asked the Andhra Pradesh Government to develop a free zone at Visakhapatnam port on the lines of Jebel Ali Free Zone in Dubai. The free zone would trigger economic growth by giving impetus to intense manufacturing and processing activity. The Jebel Ali Free Zone charged no duties on all imports and exports within the free zone. There was no need for entering tie-ups with local companies. Mr Kanwar said the free zone could offer flexible labour rules. FICCI will launch the 'Destination Andhra Pradesh' campaign to attract investments into the State. (FICCI for setting up free zone at Vizag port, BL.B, 03.05.05, N00)

Infrastructure

In a bid to enhance air connectivity the Andhra government has decided to develop airports in small towns and cities. It has initiated talks with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) to modernise existing airport infrastructure including night-landing facilities. A request has been made to the Civil Aviation Ministry and AAI to upgrade the Vijayawada and Tirupati and speed up up-gradation of the Visakhapatnam airport. The government has also wanted to convert existing runway strips at Manginapudi near Rajamundry, Nellore, Puttaparthi and Cuddapa.

Meanwhile, the government has drafted an Aviation Policy to be carried out for the next 10 years. Under this, the government plans to have airstrips in each of the district headquarters among others. (AP plans airstrips in all district headquarters, Satya Naagesh Ayyagary & KVVV Charya, FE.B, 13.02.06, N00)

Tourism Policy and Plans

The Government of AP has taken steps for promotion of tourism by providing accommodation, catering, transport and recreational facilities at various tourist places. Greater emphasis is given for rural community based, family oriented, pilgrim, adventure, eco, leisure tourism and now on cruise tourism, charters and circular train. Response from private sector for investment in tourism related activities - beach resorts, water sports, theme parks, amusement parks, trekking, golf, convention centres etc - has been good.

With the continuous efforts of the Tourism Department, domestic tourist arrivals have increased significantly from 63.3 million in 2002 to 74.1 million in 2003 and 84.9 million in 2004. Similarly the international tourist arrivals also increased from 2.10 lakh in 2002 to 4.80 lakh in 2003 and 5.01 lakh in 2004. (Buttressing the tourism potential, IE.D, 27.09.05, N00)

Nearly 18 months after getting a promise from the Union Minister of Tourism. Ms Renuka Chowdhary, the tourism industry in Andhra Pradesh can now expect a 'night bazaar' in a few months. The Union Government has chosen Hyderabad as one of the two sites to test the concept. The Rs 5-crore night bazaar would come at Shilparamam, surrounded by information technology and ITES companies in the Hi-Tec City, at Madhapur.

The proposed night bazaar would not be on the lines of the popular perception on the bazaars. The Government proposed to broaden the idea of bazaars to go beyond the popular notion that they would be dotted with pubs. The aim of setting up such a bazaar at the Hi-Tech City was to cater to the hundreds of IT pros, who worked late in the evenings. The bazaar would house eateries and shops specifically targeting them. ('Night bazaar' soon to boost tourism in AP, BL.B, 06.12.05, N00)

Recognising tourism as a major growth engine for increased employment generation and boosting economic growth, Andhra Pradesh is positioning itself as a favoured international and domestic destination. For this,

the state government is chalking out a long-term strategy, including the public-private partnership model, for promoting the state as a favourable and ultimate destination both for domestic and international tourists.

Starting from the basics which include road, rail network, air connectivity, wayside amenities, convention centres, the Department of Tourism is leaving no stone unturned to market the state in totality. This stems from the fact that the state government has taken assistance from the World Tourism Organisation to cart out long term strategy to boost the sector.

Besides, it is also the only state to offer single-window clearance for tourism projects thus facilitating the PPP model. On its part, the government is partnering with private parties for setting star hotels. Further, district collectors will be given Rs. 1 crore each to make the master plan a viable proposition.

In order to give an allocation for the tourism department has been increased to Rs 77 crore for this fiscal from the earlier government's Rs 36 crore. Initially as part of providing wayside amenities, the state government is working with Indian Oil and Reliance to house restaurants with all amenities in their petrol stations on the state's highways at 12 sites.

As part of rural development, the state government is focusing on tier-II cities such as Puttaparthi, Konaseema in the east coast whose backwaters are being aggressively promoted. However, the biggest spiritual tourism event being planned in the state is January 3-14, 2006, which envisages two lakh Buddhists to visit Amaravathi. Finally, to develop a policy framework for sustainable development and to develop human resource in the tourism sector development. AP government has established the National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Hyderabad. (AP government initiatives to strengthen tourism sector, Satya Naagesh Ayyagarv & BV Mahatakshmi, FE.B, 07.11.05, N00)

Ms Geeta Reddy, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Minister said, "The Government of Andhra Pradesh decided to put the State on par with other southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala in attracting tourists. With a focused approach aimed purely at giving a major thrust to tourism in state, the state government is embarking on a three-dimensional strategy -improving facilities at places of historical prominence, developing infrastructure and transport and giving a major boost to rural tourism. With these objectives in perspective, the government with the active involvement and participative association of the private sector has allocated Rs. 100 cm to take up new projects."

Revealing about the latest initiatives designed at giving a thrust to tourism in AP, she explained: "new tourism packages are being designed and evolved with Hyderabad, Araku,

Vishakapatnam and Tirupati as focal points. It is observed that foreign tourists to the State have been evincing keen interest to know about our agricultural products, farming practices and culture. A new concept in the form of Farm Tourism is being developed to ensure that the tourists spend considerable time in our state. This would provide the tourists with an opportunity to live in our environs and enjoy our hospitality and culture."

With a scope for employment generation in the rural sector, new marketing strategies are to be adopted. In an effort to give major boost to rural tourism, twelve places have been identified. These places would be provided with a major facelift by developing accommodation facilities. These places of historical significance will be protected with scientific inputs and museums will be developed. Kuchipudi, the famous village from where classical Kuchipudi dance form has originated, will be developed on these lines with a fund of Rs. 1 cr.

Building "Highway Hotels" is another concrete step in the right direction where the tourists will enjoy quality Andhra cuisine in highly refreshing ambience. These Highway Hotels will be established in Hyderabad, Kadapa, Vijayawada, Suryapet, Nellore, Siddipet, Tuni and other places within a year. (Tourism: The brand ambassador of AP's hospitality, FE.B, 22.04.05, N00)

Tourism Issues

The Andhra Pradesh Government has signed a pact with a tourism infrastructure company to take up the Rs 2,000-crore 'Destination Vizag' project along the beach. The project, covering 1,000-2,000 acres, is aimed

at setting up world-class hospitality, leisure, lifestyle and entertainment facilities on the beach. Once completed, the project would help attract 45,000 foreign tourists more into the State. It would bring in foreign exchange to the tune of Rs 550 crore a year. Besides, it would generate revenue to the order of Rs 112 crore for the local economy.

The project would comprise a five-star hotel, beach resort, golf courses, health spa, theme parks, convention and exhibition centres, multiplexes, mega shopping malls, marine helicopters and sea planes. The project would also take up community development activities in Visakhapatnam. It would take up cleaning and maintaining the 30-km coastline, improve amenities in the local community clusters, and spruce up the existing Zoological Park. (AP signs pact for Vizag tourism project, BL.C, 09.11.05, N00)

Hyderabad is fast emerging as an attractive destination for international conferences and seminars. But, one thing that can mar the city's attraction is the lack of adequate hotel rooms. During the SAP Games last year, one hotel even asked some regular guests to put off their travel plans as it could not offer rooms. More recently, there were two major pharma conferences. One, the India- Asean, GCC Healthcare and Pharma Conference, and over- lapping with it was the 56th Indian Pharmaceutical Congress along with a Pharma Expo. Both the conferences had a total of about 4,500 delegates. As these conferences ended, another two-day meet of the Oil Technologists Association of India began. This is when the mad rush to get accommodation began in Hyderabad.

Currently, there are about 1,200 rooms in the five-star category in Hyderabad, which are woefully inadequate. Interestingly, another 1,200 rooms will be open for occupation in the next few years. For instance, the MR group is putting up 280 rooms in the three-four star categories and Marriott through Viceroy Hotels is adding another 130 rooms by January. Moreover, according to industry watchers, the Leela Group, Hyatt and ITC, too, are eying properties in the expanding city. (Hot spot Hyderabad running short of hotel rooms, Satya Naagesh Ayyagary & KVVV Charya, FE.B, 12.12.05, N00)

Coastal Tourism

A boat cruise on the Godavari from Kunavaram jetty to the picturesque Papi Hills and the mythological Ramayana theme park in Bhadrachalam are sure going to be a thrilling experience not only to the devout who make a beeline to this ancient shrine on festive occasions but also to holiday-makers. The tourism Department has many plans to develop this riverfront town into a major tourist destination once the Polavaram irrigation project is completed. The Department is exploring the possibilities of developing a tourism corridor from Bhadrachalam to Rajahmundry on the river Godavari, the first of its kind in the state.

The present level of water in the river is not adequate enough to operate high-speed cruise boats. However, as the Polavaram project would increase the inflow upping the water level here, speed boats and liner service can be operated. (AP plans cruise on the Godavari, B Satyanarayana Reddy, IE.C, 09.02.06, N00)

Pilgrim Tourism

Tirupati, the second richest religious body in the world after the Vatican, has been facing a problem of plenty all these years. The temple complex dedicated to Lord Venkateshwara is the world's largest single consumer of commodities like sugar, cardamom, rice, pepper, cashew, turmeric, edible oil, vegetables and jaggery. The temple's huge kitchens feed thousands of devotees daily; some 100,000 laddoos are made every day for devotees - All free of cost.

The shrine draws the largest number of pilgrims each day. The temple has prospered from the gold, money and even hair that pilgrims offer to the deity. The temple trust, which already has eight tonnes of jewellery lying in its lockers, receives nearly 10 kg of gold ornaments every week from devotees.

So what novel measures have the temple authorities taken to manage this problem of plenty?

In a unique venture, the Tirupati temple authorities have roped in JRG Wealth Management Ltd, one of India's leading commodity brokers, to install an online commodity futures terminal at the temple complex. With 157

branches across the country, Kochi-based JRG is a premier stock, commodity and insurance brokerage house. For large religious places like Tirupati which millions of devotees visit every year, the daily rates of various commodities in India are very important. Through the JRG terminal, the TTD management can now view the commodity prices from all the leading commodity exchanges — National Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd, Multi Commodity Exchange of India Ltd and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Ltd.

But how do online futures trading in commodities help the Tirupati temple authorities?

Transparency in the purchase of various commodities is the most positive outcome of setting up the commodity futures terminal, points out a senior temple official. Every year, the temple authorities purchase eatable consumables worth over Rs 300 crore. More than 30 different contractors are the main suppliers of these commodities who bid and win the annual contracts.

Temple sources say the suppliers have joined hands to form a middleman cartel and take a big cut on the commodities supplied to the temple. "We will eliminate this cartel with the online commodity terminal". (Tirumala Temple opts for commodity trading, George Iype, VT.B. 02.05.05, N00)

All roads will lead to Andhra Pradesh's Amaravati in January next year when the Kalachakra 2006 will begin. This is an annual initiation ceremony for Buddhists complete with rituals and prayers and is conducted on a large scale across the globe. Every year, a new place is chosen for the event and this year, Amaravati, which is located near the river Krishna in AP's Guntur district, has been picked. The state is set to make a place for itself in the world map for Buddhist tourism in a big way. The tourism ministry has identified almost 144 sites across the state, of which 44 sites are the major ones. The state government is investing Rs 10 crore to update the infrastructure and develop the places into major tourist sites for Buddhists across the world. "Not many know that even AP has a huge Buddhist influence and so we are now trying to create an entire Buddhist circuit in the state," says AP Minister for Tourism and Sugar Dr J Geeta Reddy. (Amaravati to host Kalachakra, Sruti Nayani, ET.C. 06.12.05, N00)

■ P – GOA ■

Infrastructure

The prospect of brand new Greenfield airports at Bangalore and Hyderabad in three years has prompted states like Punjab and Maharashtra to push for similar ventures but leading the pack is Goa which has drawn up the contours of a state-of-the-art airport at Mopa by 2014.

The plan has been prepared with the help of experts from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI). Close to 2 million passengers fly in to the place every year and officials point out that there is a beeline of charter operators for permission. (Goa's ready with plan for world-class airport, Pranab Dhal Samanta, IE.D, 27.05.05, P00)

The agitation against the proposed Mopa airport, led by Churchill Alemao, MP from South Goa, got a major boost with Minister for Water Resources Filipe Neri Rodrigues joining the bandwagon. Mr. Rodrigues, a Minister in the Congress-led coalition, shared the platform of "Save Dabolim Airport Committee" in South Goa. He has joined the anti-Mopa agitation, and is fully in favour of expansion and upgradation of the Dabolim airport for optimal civilian use. Mr. Alemao has been going ahead with his agitation bringing embarrassment to the Congress. (Minister joins stir against Mopa airport, TH.B, 29.03.06, P00)

Environmental Issues

With the garbage issue still haunting the major cities in the state, the same issue has raised its ugly head in some of the villages along the coastal belt. Right from Majorda to Colva and Benaulim to Varca, heaps of garbage is seen scattered along the roadside. The locals alleged that the contractors collect the garbage from the hotels and dump the same at isolated places in the wee hours. The hoteliers countered the allegations of the locals by stating that they disposed of their garbage with paid contractors and that it was the responsibility of the contractors to dispose the same without causing any harm to the locals. However, due to lack of civic sense among those dumping the garbage, the place has become a conducive place for mosquitoes to breed and also for the domestic animals to feast on the heaps of waste along the road. The locals were of the opinion that there should be a check on the hoteliers and their engaged contractors so as to where they should dump the hotel waste.

According to the villagers, the waste generated by the three and five-starred hotels create a nuisance and very often the elected representatives turn a blind eye to such activity. The garbage managing committees also fail to yield the desired results and as such the violators take maximum advantage of the prevailing lethargic situation. (Garbage issue haunts some villages along coastal belt, NT.G, 11.09.05, P00)

The oil balls which have been so far creating panic along South Goa beaches seem to have reached the beaches in North Goa. Some residents from Reis Magos, Anjuna and Baga have claimed that they had seen the substance along the beaches. The Director of Tourism, Mr Sandeep Jacques, when contacted said that he had not received any reports of citing of oil balls along the North Goa beaches. However, he would verify the situation tomorrow by sending a team. The pollution control experts say that though this was a routine phenomenon during the monsoon along the shore, this year the quantity of oil balls along the beaches has increased. They however say that this may be because of the change in the constitution of the ocean due to tsunami.

The officials of Tourism Department said that the department has taken up the beach cleaning operation and added that in spite of cleaning the oil balls are appearing on the beaches. They said that thick oil layer was cleared at Majorda and Arossim beaches. The beach cleaning operation has started on all beaches in South Goa. (Oil balls now appear on some N Goa beaches, NT.G, 19.09.05, P00)

Tourism Policy and Plans

Master plans for all-round development of villages in Goa is in the offing as Block Development Officers (BDOs) have been directed to initiate the process with the participation of elected bodies, gram sabhas and the general public. Mr Shirodkar said that Goa has 190 village panchayats and about 52% of Goa's population reside in rural Goa. The preparation of the master plan for all the village panchayats, which will cover each and every village, could take as long as a month or two after deliberations at all levels. He regretted that there is no compact evaluation of development of villages and felt the need to set targets for the same. (Master plans for development of villages in the offing, HE.G, 25.06.05, P00)

The Goa Children's Act, 2003 was recently amended, ostensibly to deal more stringently with various forms of child abuse, as also to regulate the children's homes and hospitals, but non-governmental organisations allege that the Government was actually trying to lessen its broader responsibilities.

Extensive amendments were made to the 2003 Act in the budget session of the Assembly. The 2003 Act, aimed at creating a child-friendly society, came in the wake of criticism about the growing child abuse in tourist areas.

However, activist Albertina Almeida of Bailancho Saad, an NGO working for women and children said that the Government has used the 'facade of amendments' to dilute its obligation under the original Act to work towards "the goal of universal elementary education and eradication of child illiteracy within a period of three years. "Now the target has been pushed back to seven years. Similarly the undertaking to eradicate child labour "within two years of this Act [2003] coming into force", has been changed. Now, the Government will attempt to do it "in a phased manner".

Good provisions

The new Act, however, has some good provisions. It prohibits any medical institution or clinic or hospital or nursing home from refusing admission or treatment of a child or pregnant mother who has any illness or disease or ailment like leprosy, AIDS, etc., which has a social stigma attached to it. It provides for punishment to erring institutions with a fine which may extend to Rs.50,000.

The amended Act, among other things, has expanded the scope of various abuses under "commercial sexual exploitation of children" to include "all forms of sexual exploitation of a child including visual depiction of a child engaged in explicit sexual conduct, real or stimulated, or the lewd exhibition of genitals intended for sexual gratification of the user, done with a commercial purpose, whether for money or kind. It includes implying, allowing, using, inducing or coercing any child to engage in sexual conduct. It also includes the use of the child in assisting with other persons to engage in explicit sex."

Goa had in the recent past faced much bad publicity over child abuse by some foreign tourists. It was found that children of migrant labour loitering or straying on beaches were easy prey for child abusers. The definition of "grave sexual assault" has also been expanded to include acts like making children pose for pornographic photos and films, forcing minors to have sex with others, deliberately causing injury to sexual organs of children etc. In the amended Act the state role has been expanded to ensure that children are protected from abuse, sexual offence trafficking, prostitution and violation of rights. The Act now provides for counselling facilities by trained personnel to children in schools. (Some amendments to Goa Children's Act draw flak, TH.D, 04.09.05, P00)

Vigil would be stepped up on foreigners overstaying in Goa, police said. Foreigners, especially with business visa have come under scanner of the police following a deportation order issued by the chief secretary of the State against a German national. Ingo runs a Saturday night bazaar at Arpora. "Police have filed a case against him as he was creating law and order problem". Ingo initiated Goa's first night bazaar concept a few years back, but locals began complaining about noise pollution due to the bazaar. Goa Sanskriti Rakhan Sanghatna a local body also alleged sale of drugs at the night bazaar. Ingo has challenged the chief secretary's order in the court. "Through my bazaar, I am trying to give international exposure to local artisans," said Ingo, who has about 500 stalls selling products from shoes, garments to food. (Vigil on foreigners overstaying in Goa, TPD, 20.02.06, P00)

'The lifestyle in village and rural India has tremendous marketability among western tourists, 80 % of whom take cultural tours', says Hotelier Ralph de Souza, welcoming the Budget proposal. Goa must make a pitch to see that some of the 50 village projects are developed here, says Goa chamber of commerce and industry president Nitin Kuncolienkar. The state also hopes to attract some of the Centre's Budget proposals for the 15 integrated area tourist destination developments proposed. After a mid—nineties investment boom and with the end of Central tax exemptions, the state is hoping to bounce back by 2007. Losing out to states like Himachal Pradesh since 2000, Goa experienced capital flight. (Goa welcomes focus on tourism, Pamela D'Mello, AA.D, 01.03.06, P00)

The Government will enter into a tie-up with private sector to add water sports, adventure sports and eco-tourism to tourist packages in the Western Ghats. Aware of the need to offer more to retain its edge in tourism, the Government has finalised Tourism Master Plan: Goa-2011 (TMP) with emphasis on "strategic planning for long-term tourism development with focus on infrastructure".

According to the Economic Survey 2005-06 presented to the State Assembly during the budget session, the master plan has identified several sports and activities such as scuba diving, snorkelling, paragliding, parasailing, yachting, river rafting, trekking, cycling, skating, jogging, and sea surfing for tourism promotion. Some of the activities suggested in the master plan would be mainly set up in private sector with guidelines for regulation. Infrastructure is to be developed at the leisure tourism destinations such as beaches, water bodies, springs, and lakes. Aware of the need to resolve the tussle between the tourist taxi operators and the tour operators, Mr. Rane has proposed a one-year moratorium on buying new tourist vehicles.

Mr. Rane's budget has dealt with the continued demand of the hospitality industry to redress some of the anomalies in the luxury tax and VAT system. Luxury tax, entertainment tax and VAT structures have been rationalised, simplified and restructured with a slew of concessions. The Government has proposed to remove services such as casinos, water sports and boat cruises from the levy of luxury tax and make them taxable under entertainment tax. (Goa finalises tourism master plan, TH.B, 27.03.06, P00)

Tourism Issues

Spain's Club de Vacaciones' first charter to Goa, scheduled to touch down on 3rd Aug 05, has the tourism industry excited about the prospects of new markets for charter tourism to India. Club de Vacaciones, in collaboration with Spanair, plans a weekly charter to Goa from Madrid. The charter's local handlers, Travel Corporation India (TCI), expect 120 passengers a week on the long-haul flight. Goa's international tourism season has over the years shrunk to a mere six months, from October to March, given the weather conditions here, and the leisure industry has increasingly turned to wooing the domestic market with all-inclusive packages. (Spanish charter opens new market for tourism in Goa, DH.B, 24.06.05, P00)

Goa Deputy Chief Minister Wilfred D Souza says the state is set for a 10 % increase in foreign charters operations is being hindered by defence restrictions. "We had 690 charters fly in here last season and are expecting 750 this year. Unfortunately, there are already difficulties with the Navy in the number of landing slots being given to international chartered flights at Dabolim."

Opposition to airport: Tourism stakeholders in south Goa are opposed to the new airport and have received the unstinted support of MPs and MLAs representing southern constituencies.

De Souza too says Dabolim should be retained for the state's use. International flights to Dabolim are allowed landing only over the weekends because of defence operations. No night landings have been permitted, despite assurances for such clearances in the past. (Tourism hampered in Goa by defence curbs, DH.B, 19.09.05, P00)

It could not have been a worse end to a year of partying for the global trance trippers, who have collected on Goa's famed Anjuna beach for the first time in 25 years, the administration has come down heavy on the revellers and banned rave parties in the trance circuit of Anjuna-Vagator-Shapora, in North Goa. The silence is so spooky it's almost spectral from Disco Valley to Hilltop, Shiva Valley to Temple Place, Bamboo Forest to Monkey Valley it's a dead-end zone. Hoteliers are nervous, there will be a near riot if the thousands, have nowhere to go. The avowed and notable reason for rave ban being the drug menace at rave parties, the illicit

narcotics trade and hard drugs like ecstasy, cocaine, heroin, and other substance abuse. The police, local administration, politicians, even the church and some sections of the media have all whipped up rave rage, with obvious consequences of cultural policing and moral brigades stalking the landscape. For the locals, who depend on the tourists trade from the dozens of cheap rooms rented to travellers, to cafes, bike hires, even the chai shop run at rave parties, the loss is huge. (Rave rage hits Goa before New Year, Vrinda Gopinath, I.E.B, 31.12.05, P00)

Coastal Tourism

A 'Baina' appears to be slowly being replicated here in a festering environment with 150 illegal hutments erected in violation of Coastal Regulations Zone (CRZ) and Court orders fears are being raised about prostitution and other shady activities. A few of the 150 huts which have mushroomed over a period of time along the beach stretch, north of the touristic hub at Colva are being slowly converted into pucca structures with Mangalore tiles. And what was once a green patch and a coconut grove with swaying palm trees for people to relax, has been converted into a slum and more huts are sprouting every week.

Incidentally the authorities had moved here with bulldozers and labourers to clear the land on three occasions but pulled back due to political pressure. Director of Tourism, Elvis Comes said that the department is aware of the problem and that the matter has been taken up at the highest level.

Court order flouted

Colva: An order of the Bombay High Court at Goa dated 29 June 02 (Writ Petition 126 / 1996) to demolish the illegal constructions at Colva and file a compliance report every fortnight has been blatantly flouted. In the petition filed by Goa Foundation, the division bench had directed the tourism department through the mamlatdar, deputy collector and the district collector to keep a watch to ensure that there is no CRZ violation and demolish structures built therein. Sadly the order is not being implemented in spirit by the authorities, who are bowing to political pressure and turning a Nelson's eye to the hutments. (Another Baina is in the making at Colva beach, Goa, 15.04.05, P00)

Heritage Tourism

This is the second attempt Lady Hamlyn trust and Intach are making to take up restoration of the fort. In 2002, the trust had offered a generous £300,000 sterling endowment to restore the crumbling fort. An architect had mapped the area and drawn up initial plans which were then in active consideration. The offer though was turned down by a previous Goa regime, when objections surfaced to a clause that upper rooms of the fort be leased for 15 years as a private residence.

As a regular Goa visitor, the widow of publishing tycoon Paul Hamlyn — is keen to take up the fort's restoration as a goodwill gesture, says the representative. Though listed as one of 42 ancient historic monuments deserving protection, the government budgets are inadequate to maintain the hill top Reis Magos fort that was built by Portuguese colonisers in 1550 at a strategic hill top at the mouth of the Mandovi River. With its panoramic views of the ocean and riverfront, at least three major hotel groups in India and one from Singapore were interested in converting the fort into a heritage hotel, before a court order shot down proposal to convert the public heritage monument into private space. The amended restoration proposal now has no conditions of any sort. (Lady Helen trust to restore Goa fort, Pamela D'Mello, AA.D, 24.02.06, P00)

Health Tourism

The Industries Minister, Mr Luizinho Faleiro, has said Goa's position as a tourist destination could be exploited further by adding state-of-art medical facilities to promote it as a prime global health tourism destination. The private sector has a role in this direction, he added.

Addressing the inaugural session of the seminar on 'Health-care: the Goa Scenario' organised by the health committee of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Faleiro said that the government would play the role of facilitator and encourage private participation in improvement of facilities in the health sector. (Private sector can help promote Goa as health tourism spot: Luizinho, NT.G, 31.07.05, P00)

Social Impacts

Goa has gained a reputation far worse than Bangkok, which is considered the sex capital of the world. With no controls on its borders and no checks on people visiting the state, anyone and everyone is coming into Goa to have a good time. And it is this lack of controls and checks that are witnessing the state acquire a dirty, seamy reputation as global gangs target Goa.

According to police sources, global gangs have divided Goa's territory into different gang zones. Along the Candolim-Calangute stretch the Nigerians and British are dominant who deal in narcotics. At Anjuna-Vagator it is the Israelis, Germans and Italians. At Arambol Russians and Germans call the shots and in Palolem the Russians and Israelis have set up base.

Apart from dealing with these global gangs, the latest problem that the Goa police have on their hands is the growing sex trade that is flourishing on the coastal belts, in the form of dance bar girls who have fled Mumbai to the sunny shores of Goa.

Also with the Mumbai police closing down over 300 dance bars, 75,000 dance bar girls are seeking alternative employment. The recent arrest of five girls who were involved in a call girl racket is a testimony to this fact that many of them are attempting to make Goa their base.

Now the Goa police's latest high tech war is the internet, where there are numerous websites springing up promising women in Goa, in particular along the north Goa coastal belt. Hosted on servers, which are housed in the US, UK and Thailand, websites such as www.goaescorts.com which is part of the appointment date and time to meet a 'Goan' girl or for that matter even a foreign girl anywhere in Goa. Paedophilia also continues to haunt Goa Police as the number one sex crime in the state. The recent break through in the Swedish pornographic ring was broken on an email tip to the Goa Police. (Global sex, drug gangs target Goa, Sukumar Shastri, HE.G, 08.05.05, P00)

After the hedonism of hippiedom, now it is the paedophilia-driven tourism that is becoming a growing menace in Goa. The government to a certain extent acknowledges the problem but the foreign paedophiles have little to worry, for when they are caught, they escape easily from the state and the country without any punishment.

Probably, Michael Jackson case holds an important lesson for the only state in India, which has a Children's Act as well as a Children's Court. The speedy manner in which the trial was conducted could be a revelation to many and what is of utmost importance is that even a celebrity like Michael Jackson couldn't avoid the trial. However, child activists in Goa believe that the situation is absolutely the reverse in Goa and the paedophiles escape scot-free.

Whatever, the reason, one thing is absolutely clear. There is an urgent need for the state and judicial authorities — be it the police, the prosecutors or the judiciary — to address the issue of paedophilia in a determined and decisive manner.

Apart from Freddy Peats who had been convicted and jailed, a number of paedophiles have been identified and even apprehended by police have escaped scot-free. Recently, the details of the modus operandi of a German paedophile suspect, Jorg Harry Ringelmann came to light. His Indian wife and 'adopted daughter' — both teenagers — were barely a few years apart in age. Ringelmann used the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, applicable only to Hindus, to legitimise his relationship with a 15-year-old female child who had been in his custody from age of eight. Instead of being punished he was served a deportation notice as there was a problem with his business visa.

He volunteered to leave the country on his own and was permitted to do so on 14 August 2004. At present, Italian Giorgio Lazini and German Gunter Bachman who were accused of rape of a minor are still moving around. It is certain, the recently enacted Goa Children's Act, 2003, has provisions to deal with paedophilia more effectively but there are loopholes in the Act. (Michael Jackson case has lessons for Goa, Preetu Nair, GT.G, 22.06.05, P00)

Starting some years ago on the fringes, sex trade has now become networked with the state tourism industry in a close fashion. Inquiries with insiders in the business as well as law-enforcers have brought to light the fact that elements from virtually every segment of the tourist industry from roadside tourist touts to the room-boys in the warm and hospitable hotels to the taxi drivers to the motorcycle pilot riders have a share in the income from sex trade.

The women involved belong to all age groups from minors for the paedophiles to teenagers to married women. For some it is just keeping the life going on, for others it is a more paying vocation, for still others it is to keep a luxurious lifestyle going on.

And not all these women come from other states. Quite a few of them are Goans, according to the insiders. Technology is only fuelling the growth of the trade. Today when a hustler wants to market the girls, he has their photos — which are sometimes topless or more revealing — on his cellphone to show to the potential customers. Once the customer has selected a girl, the network makes arrangement for the girl to reach his place or him to reach an appointed place.

According to inquiries, hustlers with photos of girls on cellphones are roaming around at popular tourist spots, like beaches, river cruises and public transport stations. The trade has spread its network even to far-flung villages. Several hotels and lodges provide temporary to longer lodging to girls to cater to the tourists or locals from different strata of the society.

Police also have information about call girl business going on in five star hotels. But often no action can be taken because of involvement of big and powerful people. Both the girls and the customers come from well to do families. Police action is also hampered by the fact that the girls, if arrested, usually tend to make a statement that they were indulging in sex of their own free will and not for trade. With the surprise raids by the CID\Crime Branch sleuths and police parties, most of the hoteliers, hustlers and women engaged in the trade have become more vigilant and are conducting the business very cautiously. Sometimes, the business goes under the cover of other businesses, like massage parlours. (Sex intertwines with tourism in Goa, Shaikh Jamaluddin, NT.G, 11.08.05, P00)

The president of the Mumbai Bar Girls Union Varsha Kale, said that 10,000 bar girls would come to Goa this tourist season. The Goa police, as usual, appear clueless with DGP Katna saying, "Gomatak Times has information about this but we don't". 75,000 bar girls have been rendered jobless due to the closure of dance bars in Mumbai. The girl, who swayed to the music and mesmerized patrons in the dance bars till the recent past, used to earn Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 a month. Traffickers are already luring many bar girls into the flesh trade and some girls have been already brought to Goa. "Gross injustice has been done to us and we will now sell our body to earn a living and no moral guardian has any right to criticize us," said Rekha. (We are ready to paint Goa 'red' – Mumbai bar girls, Preetu Nair, GT.G, 30.08.05, P00)

A police-public interaction meet organised today at the Panjim police station highlighted the menace of the dance bar girls frequenting the state and the precautions that could be taken to curb this menace. The meet that was attended by 42 representatives of the hospitality industry within the jurisdiction of the Panjim police station, emphasised the need to maintain a proper register of the hotel employees as well as that of their guests who utilise their accommodation facilities. The police requested the small group of representatives of hoteliers, lodge owners and guest house owners to maintain a meticulous entry of the names and addresses of their guests on their guest register and that the mandatory provision of filling the 'C' forms and submitting them to the Foreigners Registration Office (FRO) or the nearest police station within 24 hours be complied immediately. Another issue that was discussed at the interaction was that of harassment of tourists by non-registered guides or touts with the police suggesting that only those guides approved by the Goa Tourism Development Corporation be encouraged. It is learnt that this police-public interaction that has been revived will be conducted on a regular basis with different groups of citizens at least twice a month. (Police-public interaction calls for steps to check bar girls menace, HE.G, 24.09.05, P00)

Alongside the fish menus and water skiing leaflets pinned up in the wooden beach shacks along the Goa coast, tourists have been confronted this season with less palatable posters warning them of the presence of paedophiles roaming the seafront. The poster campaign is part of a widening effort by the local charities to help Goa shake off its emerging reputation as a centre for child sex tourism. Foreigners arriving by charter flights from Europe are given leaflets detailing the penalties for child sex abuse. "Welcome to Goa, land of

lovely beaches and friendly people,” the pamphlet begins, before declaring that paedophilia has become a “serious problem.” Charity workers have set up surveillance stations on four of the state’s most popular northern beaches to help monitor suspicious behaviour among foreigners; a team of workers is paid to patrol the beaches to keep an eye on visitors; and tourists are invited to call hotline numbers if they see any fellow vacationers engaging in troubling behaviour.

Goa’s state Legislative Assembly approved a law in 2003 intended to make the prosecution of paedophiles easier and introducing a maximum 10 years’ sentence. But activists said no foreigners have been convicted under the act and expressed frustration at what they regarded as a lack of will on the part of the local authorities to tackle the problem. Goa’s director-general of police, Neeraj Kumar, said that tackling child sex tourism was a priority, but he added that he felt the problem was on the decline. In a report entitled *Trafficking in Women and Children in India*, published in January, the National Human Rights Commission warned that the situation had reached a critical stage. “In India the abuse of both male and female children by tourists has acquired serious dimensions,” it said. “Unlike Sri Lanka and Thailand, this problem has not been seriously tackled.” (Goa tries hard to repair reputation, Amelia Gentleman, AA.D, 19.02.06, P00 / E40)

Crime, Drugs

The satellite town of Porvorim is slowly and gradually becoming a hub for criminal activities. Thefts, burglaries and murders are increasing day-by-day and the Porvorim police have become ineffective in curbing the crime rate. (Porvorim becoming a haven for criminals, HE.G, 28.06.05, P00)

Two Nigerians, claiming to be footballers playing for a professional club in Goa, were arrested by the anti-narcotics cell (ANC) for peddling cocaine across the State. None of the professional clubs in Goa had taken responsibility of those ostensible “footballers”. Amman Chukwu Umeh and Clement Tochi Nnebedurn, both in their twenties, were arrested by the Goa police for possessing drugs. The ANC seized cocaine worth Rs 30 lakh from the duo. The haul is considered to one of the biggest in this coastal State famous for its rave parties. (Nigerians arrested for drug peddling in Goa, Rupesh Samant, TPD 28.09.05, P00)

■ Q – NORTH EAST ■

ADB has announced a face-lift project for five capital towns of north-eastern India under North-Eastern Region Urban Development Plan, scheduled to be completed by the next six years. A high level ADB team came to study the progress of the project and assured that the work on the new project would begin in mid 2007 and is likely to be completed by mid-2011. Along with Agartala, ADB is going to implement the project in four other state capitals of the region – Aizwal (Mizoram), Gangtok (Sikkim), Kohima (Nagaland) and Shillong (Meghalaya). The project is a comprehensive one to ensure overall development of the urban facilities including water supply, sewerage & sanitation, solid and bio-medical waste management, traffic and transportation, electrification in town areas, flood control and slum upgradation and heritage conservation. (Rs 900 crore ADB aid for North-East, DH.B, 24.05.05, Q00)

The Central government has increased the amount sanctioned to promote 53 tourism projects in the entire Northeast region by a staggering 75 % to Rs 127.53 crores for the period ending Feb 06. According to an Assocham study, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, in the entire fiscal of 2004-05, had sanctioned Rs 72.75 crores for 32 projects for all states in the northeast region with a view to promote various tourist destinations and spots. According to the chamber, the government had realised the potential of economic activities in such states to positively impact the growth of tourism and tourism related activities in the country.

In the case of Assam, the number of projects sanctioned for tourism promotion in 04-05 stood at 6 with the corresponding allocation amount of Rs 9.56 crores, however, by Feb 06 the department had increased the number of projects to 8, for which sanctioned amount was increased to Rs 21.25 crores. For Arunachal Pradesh, Rs 22.40 crores had been sanctioned for 10 projects while 9 projects had been given the green signal for each of the states of Mizoram and Nagaland, while 14 had been sanctioned for Sikkim and only 3 Tripura during the Feb 06 period. The amount allocated for the states varied between Rs. 22-71 crores. (Northeast gets generous tourism fund, AA.B, 16.03.06, Q00)

Sikkim

Data on Sikkim culled over seven years show a steady increase in its popularity abroad. In 1998, the total number of foreign tourists visiting the state was 6891, while, by April this year, the state has already registered 6281 tourists and the numbers are growing. The rise of insurgency in Nepal has apparently boosted foreign tourist inflow to the state, instructions issued to their citizens by foreign governments against travelling in Nepal being a prime reason for this. In 2003, the state recorded 10,956 tourists and the figures rested at 13,555 individuals in 2004. The inclusion of the Nathu La corridor in the Buddhist tourism circuit and the talk about linking Nathu La to Tibet's Lhasa is expected to increase tourist inflow to Sikkim. Kailash-Mansarovar; a popular pilgrimage and tourism destination, is expected to be a prime attraction. Also, with Nathu La opening the route to Tibet, experts feel that a significant portion of the over 500,000 tourists who visit Tibet through mainland China will prefer the Sikkim route. (Nepal's loss is Sikkim's gain, TS.D, 22.05.05, Q00)

Nagaland

All types of hunting, poaching and trade of wild animals have been banned throughout Nagaland through an order passed by the Deputy Commissioner of Dimapur. In her order, the DC said any individual or group, indulging in any such activity shall be liable to prosecution and penalties, including forfeiture of property or articles used in committing wildlife offences. The punishment also would include imprisonment and fine. (Nagaland bans hunting, VT.B, 07.07.05, Q00)

Assam

The Assam government has adopted a cultural policy to preserve and strengthen the cultural mosaic in the state inhabited by a large number of ethnic groups and indigenous communities with diverse cultural traditions and practices. The policy is aimed at packaging this north eastern state as a top-line cultural destination on the strength of its colourful tribal traditions. The Central government has promised Rs 3.60 crore for setting up of two multi-purpose cultural complexes. (Culture policy to preserve Assam, VT.B, 04.01.06, Q00)

■ S – OTHER STATES ■

S00 States

The smaller states in the country are becoming the hotbed of investment, both overseas and domestic, with a large share of investment enquiries being made for projects in these states.

Investment worth billions of dollars have lined up for these states that have fast created opportunities outside the traditional investment destinations.

According to a study constituted by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry more than 300 enquiries have been generated in the past few months from investors who are looking at smaller states to set up their projects. A majority of these investment enquiries have come from overseas investors who feel it is better to negotiate a deal the small states than deal with cumbersome procedure adopted by larger states. The study has found that smaller states of Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and even Jammu and Kashmir have emerged as preferred destinations for investment by both overseas and domestic investors because of opportunity cost these states offer in terms of incentives, holiday schemes and availability of raw material to investors. (Small states now hotbed of big investments, FE.B, 15.06.05, S00)

S10 Eastern India

Orissa

The sight of scattered rice, broken pots and assorted garbage at Anand Bazar, the public dining area of the world famous temple, have so far taken a heavy toll on the appetite of hygiene-conscious devotees. Such complaints, however, may soon be a thing of the past if the temple administration is allowed a free hand in executing its plans for the renovation of the place which is chock-a-block with people in the evening when thousands partake of the Mahaprasad (cooked food offered to Lord Jagannath) in the open. The issue of giving Anand Bazar a facelift was discussed at a top level meeting with a majority expressing itself in favour of constructing stalls for the sale of Mahaparsad and setting up facilities for its hygienic storage so that devotees could even take it home without any hesitation. However, execution of plans in this regard would depend upon the consent of the Archaeological Survey of India which has been entrusted with the task of ensuring the safety and security of this 12th century shrine which also happens to be the biggest tourist attraction of the State.

Obtaining the ASI's consent may not be easy considering the agency, having faced flak in the past over mishaps caused by displacement of stones within the temple complex, remains extremely sensitive to any suggestions for a structural change. While the main part of the temple including the sanctum sanctorum remains most vulnerable to stress and strain caused by the loosening of stones over hundreds of years, even the Anand Bazar boundary wall has begun showing signs of severe wear and tear. (Jagannath Temple's Anand Bazar to get a facelift, Ashutosh Mishra, T.P.D, 20.04.05, S10)

Orissa government's proposal for a beach highway

- ◆ The 480 km beach highway will connect Talasari in Balasore, Orissa to Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh
- ◆ On the way, will be a number of beaches like Chandipur, Puri, Konark, Gopalpur and Sonepur in Orissa and Kalingapatnam, Beemunipatnam, Vishakhapatnam and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh.
- ◆ Cottages, hotels, parks, amusement parks will be developed along the route
- ◆ The Asian Development Bank has been approached for funds.

(Baywatch, Satyen Mohapatra, H.T.D, 09.05.05, S10)

A new wave of industrialisation threatens to make the people of Orissa environmental refugees in their own land. The State's air, water, wildlife and people's livelihoods are being destroyed by the so-called industrial blitzkrieg, according to environmentalists. Spurred by the spiralling demand for steel and aluminium in the

international market, several conglomerates have come forward to set up metal production units to exploit the mineral resources of the State. Instead of planning for metal production spread over the next 100-200 years, the State Government has adopted a "myopic and self-destructive" policy of exhausting the entire stock of 3,120 million tonnes of iron ore and 1,626 mt of bauxite within 20-25 years, according to environmental activist Mr Biswajit Mohanty. The industrialisation boom is expected to result in massive environmental degradation since the local environment has a limited "carrying capacity" to absorb and assimilate effluents and wastes produced due to such gigantic production facilities being squeezed within a very short time. ('Industrialisation will harm Orissa's ecology', Prafulla Das, BL.B, 07.06.05, S10)

Nandita Das will be the brand ambassador of Orissa Tourism, according to Mr Suriya Narayan Patro, Orissa's Tourism Minister. The appointment of the brand ambassador, as the Minister explained, was only one component of the multi-pronged strategy finalised by the Orissa Government to promote State's tourism, the other components being organising road shows both within the country and outside, appointing consultants and experts in the field to decide on the right strategy and improving infrastructure. The State Tourism Department, according to him, has empanelled Leo Burnett and Rediffusion to promote the State among tourists, existing and prospective. As for infrastructure development, the Minister said the emphasis was on improving the connectivity.

"In past two years we've spent nearly Rs 80 crore to improve the roads in various tourist centres and propose to spend about Rs 100 crore in the current fiscal," he said. A part of the fund provided by the Centre for road development was being used to improve connectivity in various places of tourist attraction. Part of the infrastructure development, as it was pointed, would also be through private-public partnership. Thus, land was being offered by the State government to set up hotels by private entrepreneurs.

For Dhaluli, there would be an additional allocation of Rs 4.5 crore and the services of the Baroda-based architect, Mr Karan Grover, were being requisitioned. The sea beach in Puri too was being beautified at a cost of Rs 5 crore and the promenade was being extended by about 1.5 kms. (Orissa to step up tourism promotion — Ropes in actress Nandita Das as brand ambassador, BL.C, 20.08.05, S10)

The last time we visited the Orissa seaside resort of Puri was in 1981 when apart from one old hotel which had by then become a seven-storey monstrosity and a couple of new establishments which had come up on the southern side of the temple town the town had barely changed its character from what it had always been for decades past. In fact, the first thing that strikes the eye in Puri today, specially to someone who is visiting it after quite some time, is its development as a tourist centre. In earlier times, the seaside front of the town extended only till the point known as Swargodwar, adjacent to the burning ghat.

It was rather surprising to be told that even today, with all its material development, Puri continues to attract tourists mainly from West Bengal and Calcutta, who form more than 90 % of the visitors. Not only this, a very substantial part of the investment that has been poured into the resort has also come from Bengal, which suggests that the Bengali connection with Puri has become even stronger than before. In a nutshell, it can safely be said that Puri is booming as a tourist resort, specially that part of it that extends southward along the coast. The northern part, generally, still retains its old-world, quite ambience. (Sea-change in Puri, Ranabir Ray Choudhury, BL.B, 14.01.06, S10)

Is the Sun Temple at Konark crumbling? Orissa Government thinks so but the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) here says no. The State Culture Minister Damodar Rout constituted a two-member committee to examine the World Heritage Site and submit a report within 24 hours following reports that a technical committee of ASI spotted structural weaknesses.'

The eight-member committee, constituted by Director General of ASI, visited the structure on January 16 and held meeting with ASI officials about the monument's conservation. The committee, slated to submit its report to the DG of ASI, is reported to have detected two things - one, a crack in the cantilever in the southern side of the 13th century monument and two depressions in sand-filling. The committee is believed to have suggested ASI to initiate urgent steps for rectifying any structural weakness. (Is Sun temple crumbling?, IE.B, 20.01.06, S10)

With reports of the first bird flu cases in India hitting headlines, the authorities at Chilika Lake — a favoured destination of avians from colder climes geared up to pre-empt an outbreak of the H5N1 virus among

humans. As part of the fire-fighting measures, a ban has been imposed on the entry of visitors into the Chilika (Nalabana) sanctuary to shield them from migratory birds. Nearly three lakh migratory birds from Central Asia, China and the Far East are still at Chilika preparing for their return journey with winter on its way out. The authorities have also launched an awareness drive in villages in the vicinity of the lake. Last month, 1,685 migratory birds died at Chilika raising spectres of bird flu. Samples were collected from the carcasses and sent to various laboratories. (Chilika out of bounds for guests, Soumyajit Pattnaik, HT.D, 21.02.05, S10)

West Bengal

The West Bengal Government has decided to start the concept of tea tourism in the state. A detailed project report on this has already been prepared by the tourism department and a total of Rs 80 crore has been sanctioned. We are planning to build golf courses in tea gardens and also some national wild life parks for tourists with a penchant for adventure. Once we do that we are sure that a huge number of tourists will flock into West Bengal. Plans were afoot to develop the Sunderbans as an eco-tourism spot. The 12th Finance Commission has already sanctioned Rs 100 crore for the project. Efforts are on to rope in the Asian Development Bank and UNESCO for the project. (West Bengal tea gardens turning into tourist spots, IE.C, 17.08.05, S10)

The Centre announced Sixth Schedule status to the GNLF-led Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, which would ensure greater autonomy to the governing body in the Hill District of West Bengal. A tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) was signed here between the Centre, West Bengal Government and the Subhas Ghising-led Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) after two days of hectic deliberations. The Amendment Bill to grant Sixth Schedule status to the DGHC on the lines of such district councils in the North-east is likely to be introduced in the Budget session of Parliament. Under the Sixth Schedule, the district council will get more powers similar to those enjoyed by the Autonomous District Councils of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. The Home Minister said, 'With the signing of the Memorandum, the DGHC will have status of Districts of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and will have legislative and executive powers and will fulfill the desires of the people. A Bill to amend the Constitution will be introduced in Parliament. Once passed, elections will be held to the Council.' (Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, TH.B, 07.12.05, S10)

The toy train of Darjeeling remains one of the main draws for tourists along with the Kanchenjunga. The snowy peaks remain a stable feature for the Darjeeling-bound tourists, but the toy train has become a problem it keeps slipping off its tracks. In the last fortnight alone, the Darjeeling toy train has derailed three times. Although no injuries were reported from these derailments, like the heritage train keeps going off track it could have disastrous consequences for passengers sooner or later. Although no official reasons were given for the derailments, one cause could be the heavy traffic on the national highway which runs parallel to the tracks for a long distance. (Toy train, your slip is showing, Anjana Pradhan, TOI.B, 23.03.06, S10)

S20 North India

Uttar Pradesh

Hoping to attract more foreigners and get them to extend their stay in Agra, the Uttar Pradesh Government would arrange laser shows and set up casinos in select hotels. A sum of Rs. 15.60 crores, out of Rs. 110 crores sanctioned for the city by State Government, would be utilised to promote night tourism, Divisional Commissioner, Ashok Kumar. It was proposed to keep open at night the artisans village in Shilpagram, 1-km east of the Taj Mahal, and the Sadar Bazaar, both favourite tourist haunts, he said. The Commissioner said Rs 26.4 crore would be utilised for managing solid waste one km around the Taj and a comprehensive plan costing Rs 102 crore had been drawn up to improve Agra's drainage system. Land for a proposed international airport would be made available on the Agra Delhi road. (Casinos coming up in Agra, TH.D, 30.09.05, S20)

In an attempt to give further fillip to tourism in the State, the Uttar Pradesh Government is embarking on a unique plan of reviving the treasured Mahabharat period. Tourism department sources said that an action plan has been drawn to develop a Mahabharat Age Tourist Circuit in the western part of the State, by tracing the remains of the prized period and also developing places mentioned in the epic by Ved Vyas. As part of the action plan excavation will be carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the Baghpatt district, which is believed to house the five villages demanded by Pandavas from Kaurav King Dhritrashtra.

The other places associated with Mahabharat including Hastinapur and Parikshitgarh in Meerut district, Shukratal in Muzaffarnagar district and Garhmukteshar in Ghaziabad district will be developed further to be a part of the Mahabharat Circuit. (UP Tourism hopes to cash in on Mahabharat heritage, BL.B, 01.11.05, S20)

Delhi

The Delhi High court ordered the Chief Secretary of Delhi Government to form a permanent committee, within a week, to ensure the removal of encroachment in and around the protected monuments in the city. The committee said the court, must comprise representatives from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Delhi Police, Delhi Development Authority, New Delhi Municipal Council, Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Delhi Cantonment Board. The purpose behind the formation of this committee said the court, is to prevent the "passing the buck" approach of various agencies. Displeased over this behaviour of the ASI and other civic agencies on the removal of encroachments in and around monuments, protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, the bench ordered the formation of a committee. The view to form a committee came up when ASI's counsel Sanjay Jain expressed, on behalf of his client, the inability to remove encroachments from around a protected monument in Mehrauli area. (HC asks for panel to rid monuments of encroachments, TOI.D, 21.04.05, S20 / D20d)

The MCD's heritage walk around parts of old Delhi, which was supposed to be an enriching cultural experience for the participants, ended in a tense showdown. The Imam said that the MCD had not given any prior intimation about the walk. The Imam said that when he reached Jama Masjid, he saw that two participants of the heritage walk had entered the complex with shoes, which had enraged the crowd further. (MCD heritage walk stumbles, HT, Delhi, 01.05.05, S20)

Bungy jumping and adventure parks in east Delhi have taken a dive in favour of developmental projects on the Trans-Yamuna Development Board's agenda. The Rs 1.15-crore proposal for an adventure park in Sanjay Lake, for instance, was among several projects turned down in the Rs 78.4-crore budget approved by the board.

The proposed adventure park at Sanjay Lake, one of its kind in east Delhi, has already got approval from DDA and is awaiting sanction of funds. Board chairman Narendra Nath said it might be considered in the revised estimate towards the end of the financial year. That would include the cost of constructing pathways, a boundary and setting up of a power station. (Park plans wait for Yamuna Board nod, IE.D, 04.05.05, S20/D20a)

The concept of coffee homes as a meeting place is fast losing its charm for the city's average citizen. It is now all set to undergo a major change if plans drawn up by Delhi Tourism are anything to go by. The new concept of designer coffee homes is aimed at retaining the coffee home nostalgia but at the same time re-establishing it as a 'brand' using the built ambience and making it a multipurpose usable space.

The first of five such outlets is scheduled to come up at Janakpuri in West Delhi where work is expected to start this year itself. The Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC) has already short-listed half a dozen consultants for the project and the process to obtain financial sanction for the project has been set in motion. (Delhi Tourism to set up designer coffee homes, Sujay Mehdudia, TH.D, 16.05.05, S20)

The Heritage value of Gole Market and the All India Radio (AIR) building at Sansad Marg has been declared to be on a par with that of Safadarjung Tomb and Parliament House by the Union Urban Development Ministry. These are among 21 heritage structures that have been listed in Grade I, which require "careful preservation". The list includes Jantar Mantar, India Gate, Gole Dak Khana, Presidential estate, North and south Blocks, Baroda House and the Central Telegraph office.

Eighty-seven structures figure in the Grade II list, which includes Connaught Place, Parliament Street Police station, National Stadium, Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC) and Teen Murti House. There are 39 structures in Grade III, which includes Patiala House, Modern School, Imperial Hotel, Minto Bridge, Sunheri Masjid, Lady Irwin College and Sujay Singh Park. Structure in grade II and III require "intelligent conservation". The rating

was fixed by the ministry after going over a list of 147 heritage buildings within the jurisdiction of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC). Similar grading will be accorded to heritage buildings/ precincts in MCD areas too. Once the grading is notified, the heritage committee constituted by the ministry will work with various civic agencies to restore the structures to their original glory. (Heritage crown for Gole Mkt, Vibha Sharma, HT.D, 04.06.05, S20)

Delhi Metro and RITES made their presentation on the controversial elevated track near the Qutub Minar. However, UNESCO has warned that such a move could have serious “visual impact” on this World Heritage site. The Hampi group of monuments in Karnataka were declared an ‘endangered’ site in 1999 after two bridges were built there. Similarly, there was a threat of the same happening with the Taj had the controversial corridor project materialised.

While the buffer zone is a much larger concept, ASI sources say the elevated track and station are proposed to be built in the regulated zone of the Qutub complex – just beyond 100 metres. The ASI has asked the Metro team to get a vibration study conducted, which means, they first want a study whether the ground below the Qutub or the structure itself will be affected by the movement of trains and the massive construction work. The exact position of the proposed station and the impact of this with the high pillars required for laying the elevated track will be studied. (Metro near Qutub: UNESCO waves red flags, Saurabh Sinha, TOI.M, 01.08.05, S20 / D20d)

Delhi is witnessing a rapid growth of inns; the reason ascribed for this is the space crunch in hotels owing to large number of tourists (both domestic and international) who visit the city. At times, however, tourists prefer inns over hotels for the sake of privacy. They don’t take a room in hotels (five star included) to avoid seeing familiar faces.

To open an inn requires a licence from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the Delhi police. Time inns are liable to pay 12.5 % of their revenue as luxury tax. The licence is renewed every year. Those who fail to renew their licences are forced to shut shop by the authorities. Many believe that the inns also serve as an affordable option for teenagers from rich families to indulge escapades. Rakesh Kumar Gupta, a resident of Sukhdev Vihar, who has been observing the people moving in and out from an inn near his home, says, “The inns are viable option for wealthy kids to spend time in the company of wine and women.” There are some inns that have special offers to lure youngsters. (Executives prefer inns to hotels, Nawaid Anjum, AA.D, 08.09.05, S20 / C30)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has endangered the Qutub Minar as well as the lives of thousands of air passengers by not operating the twin flight warning lights atop the 13th century historical tower at a time when dense clouds have sharply reduced visibility. A worried Delhi Air Traffic Control (ATC) has asked ASI to urgently do the needful for getting at least one of the lights operational, as the 72.5-metre Qutub is almost on the flight path of the Delhi airport. With the return of the monsoon, visibility particularly at night, drops considerably. (Dark danger atop Qutub, Saurabh Sinha, TOI.D, 15.09.05, S20 / D20d)

Dilli Haat will soon get a brand new look and design. The makeover of the Haat, spread over six acres opposite the INA Market, will be done keeping in mind the requirements of foreign tourists, who throng the venue in large numbers and look for a ‘rich rural touch’ to the entire setting. The Haat will get a new lighting system and an art gallery. For the convenience of foreigners, a money exchange bureau will also be set up, along with an information centre. The DTTDC also aims to deploy translators for all major foreign languages.

The tourism corporation is also working out a plan for the kitchen area. Authentic cuisines from various states are one of the attractions at the Haat and this would be made all the more attractive. The entire area will be made disabled-friendly. The Rs 5-crore project has been given the final nod after a board meeting comprising officials from the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC), the Union ministries of textiles and tourism and the NDMC. The tourism ministry and NDMC will jointly fund the project. (Rs 5-cr makeover for Dilli Haat, Amitash Shukia, HT.D, 05.10.05, S20)

Commonwealth Games

Development of parks, heritage sites and proper conservation of monuments is all set to acquire a new dimension with plans being drawn up now for a comprehensive project that would make Delhi a "heritage city" in time for the Commonwealth Games 2010.

The concept of projecting Delhi as a heritage city is not only about declaring it as such, but creating a unique selling proposition (USP) for it ahead of the Commonwealth Games to attract more and more tourists to it.

Plan of action: Mr. Jain said that though Delhi with over 1,200 listed monuments is as it is a heritage city, we are viewing the Commonwealth Games as a great opportunity to complete some unfinished tasks in making it really live up to the reputation and this involves development up-keep and conservation of six different areas of historical importance."

Elaborating on the proposals he said, "one of the major areas of work would be the development of an archaeological park in Mehrauli and integration of the 26 acre Qutub complex with the 100 acre Jamali Qamali area which has around 50 monuments."

The plan also envisages development of the Tughlaqabad Fort area, and the Nizamuddin area with Humayun's Tomb being the given utmost importance. Another old part of Delhi, the Walled City, is also sought to be conserved under the plan with special emphasis on Chandni Chowk, Dariba Kalan and Kinari Bazar, where heritage walks have also been introduced.

Also envisages development of Connaught Place, Gol Dak Khana and Gol Market in tune with their historic importance. (Plan to make Delhi a "heritage city", Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, TH.D, 28.04.05, S20)

At least six places along the Yamuna will be selected in the next few weeks and developed as tourist and cultural hubs for the 2010 Commonwealth Games. These centres would have eating places and entertainment venues for tourists, players and officials who would visit Delhi during the games. The tourism department has appointed a consultant to suggest spots along the riverfront and other places in the city which may be taken up for beautification. Principal secretary (UD), O.P. Kelkar, who has visited Melbourne, the venue of the 2006 games, presented a blueprint of what the Australian city was doing and what Delhi could learn. The visit of the Delhi government officials was part of a scheme "transfer of knowledge" between the host country for the 2006 Games and Delhi. (Tourist hubs for C'wealth Games, Amitabh Shukla, HT.D, 05.05.05, S20)

The Government has decided to expedite the process of allocating land for 40 new five-star hotels in Delhi in expectation of huge tourist influx during the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

Stating this at a national conference on 'Is Law Keeping Pace with Growth of Travel and Hospitality Industry and Tourism - The Legal Framework' organised by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The private sector should concentrate on constructing hotels instead of townships as these hotels will add to the hospitality industry on a long-term basis. It was time for the travel industry to be more proactive to promote India as a prime tourist destination. It is a positive indicator that many new and seasoned groups have committed investments worth Rs 100,000 crore for their operational and capacity expansion. (Govt to allot land for 40 five-star hotels in Delhi, BL.C, 17.07.05, S20)

A number of projects are underway to make Delhi a tourist destination by the 2010 Commonwealth Games. These include an Eco-tourism complex in Chawala, a Heritage Park in Mehrauli, Dilli Haats (under construction) in Pitampura and Geeta Colony. Other plans include special air conditioned buses with GPS linking several tourist destinations in the city. The bus service to link the tourist spots to the Airport, Railway stations, and other services is another tourism initiative. The air conditioned buses with the GPS equipment shall tour the city with possible tie ups with major hotels. Another project being developed now is the eco tourism complex in Chawala. The area also sees a number of migratory birds and should attract bird-watchers too. (Eco-tourism complex in Chawala by 2010: Govt, Gopal Sathe, IE.D, 04.10.05, S20/ D20i)

For utilisation of the Commonwealth Games village after the 2010 games are over, the Delhi Development Authority has proposed to auction the Commonwealth Games plot for building two large five star hotels and three guesthouses. "The idea behind auctioning the plots as hotels and guesthouses is to make it commercially

viable once the games are over," said an official of the land department. (Five-star hotels to come up on Commonwealth Games village, DDA proposes to auction plots for 3 hotels and 3 guesthouses once games are over, Esha Roy, IE.D, 05.10.05, S20)

The Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation (DTTDC) is all set to put in place a track for adventurous water sports like canoeing and kayaking. The corporation has identified the wastelands in the west Delhi - Kanganheri and Chhawla, which are surrounded by Najafgarh drain as the site for the project. The project is worth Rs 20 crore and DTTDC hopes to complete it on the eve of Commonwealth Games 2010. The development of these wastelands, according to officials will prove to be a major tourist attraction, especially for youngsters. Also, it would be another avenue for revenue generation for the tourism department. (DTTDC plans water sports facility in West Delhi, Rajat Guha, FE.D, 21.02.06, S20 / D20a)

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) raked in Rs 943 crore from an hotel plot auction, its second highest take in a land sale after the Rs 1,100 crore obtained for the Vasant Kunj Mall plot two years ago. Seven of the nine plots in Shahdara, Motiakhan, Jasola, Rohini and Okhla, listed for bids exceeded the combined reserve price of Rs 530 crore. Two plots were unsold.

Not surprisingly plots in South Delhi fetched the highest bids. The record bid of Rs 199 crore came from MGF and Dubai-based concern Emaar for 2.5 acre plot in Jasola and another two-acre plot also in Jasola. DDA Commissioner, Land Disposal, R K Singh said the hotel plots were a big draw for three main reasons—increasing land rates, pending demand and the shortage of room space to meet the demand that would be created by the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

What they went for:

| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Jasola (2.5 acre): | Rs. 199 cr |
| Jasola (2 acre): | Rs. 189 cr |
| Moti Khan (1acre): | Rs. 88 cr |
| Shahdara (5acre): | Rs. 170 cr |
| Shahdara (2acre): | Rs. 47.3 cr |
| Rohini (5,000 sqm): | Rs. 99 cr |
| Okhla (2 acre): | Rs. 152 cr |

(Hotel plots auction nets Rs 943 crore, Dubai firm MGF consortium bags two plots in Jasola for Rs 388 crore, IE.D, 04.03.06, S20)

Uttaranchal

The State of Uttaranchal is encouraging responsible tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life; it is also the key to sustainable ecological development. Uttaranchal right from inception has pledged to emerge as a tourism power. The second year of operations witnessed tourism activities to highlight the states diverse attractions. In the first phase, the focus was on a consistent campaign to create an identity. While in the second phase, the promotion was on specific products, such as adventure tourism, eco-tourism and spiritual tourism. During a meeting of the National Committee on Eco Tourism and Mountains, the then Tourism Minister had announced that Uttaranchal would be developed as a key Eco-tourism destination in the country and in pursuance of this, the Government of India is developing four to five eco- tourism centres to project the state as an ideal eco-destination world over. To begin with, Uttaranchal, Leh and Ladakh have been identified for this purpose.

The stress on eco-tourism ensures that Uttaranchal is a paradise for adventure sports like mountaineering, trekking, skiing, skating, water sports to aero-sports like hand-gliding and paragliding. The state has also prepared numerous master plans for several new projects seeking private sector investment. These eco-cities in Hempur near George Everest Park, development of an eco-tourism project on 200 acres of land at George Everest Estate near Mussoorie and a trek master plan. The other efforts would entail master plans for development of new hill stations at Pauri, Khirsu, Lansdowne, Munsyari and Pithoragarh.

A village near Ramnagar is being developed as a centre for eco-tourism. There are also plans to tie up with Hyatt & Four Seasons Hotels and Chescor Capital of UK to develop an eco-city near Rampur, which is expected to cost Rs 500 crore. Similarly a master plan for trekking is being developed along with a project for trekking at Uttarkashi at an altitude of 10000 feet, which would entail an investment of Rs 60 crore. Besides, the property of George Everest in Musoorie is being developed as a heritage property on an area of 200 acres. There are also plans to have helistrips in all 17 districts of the state.

Expenditure on schemes for tourism development and promotion of tourism in Uttaranchal has progressively increased over the years. In the current 5-year plan, approximately Rs.8600 lakhs have been spent, which is more than ten times the amount spent during 80-85. Some idea of the additional investments that will be required is provided by the fact that, during the year 2000, the number of tourists who visited Uttaranchal stood at over 111 lakhs, whereas the total population of the State was merely 82 lakhs. (Uttaranchal, Simply Heaven, Eco-tourism taking off in Devbhoomi, FE.C, Apr-May 05, S20/ D20i)

The Valley of Flowers National Park in Uttaranchal could soon find a place on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) World Heritage List.

The Valley of Flowers is among the eight new sites recommended by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to the World Heritage Committee for inclusion in the World Heritage List.

IUCN has recommended the extension of India's Nanda Devi National Park already a World Heritage site to include the Valley of Flowers. The World Heritage Committee, meeting in Durban from July 10 to July 17, will consider the 'inscription' of new sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List. This year, the committee will review 28 cultural sites, 10 natural sites and 4 mixed sites and also examine the extension of 9 World Heritage sites. (Valley of Flowers recommended for Unesco World Heritage List, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.C, 11.07.05, S20)

Interview with Lt Gen. TPS Rawat (retd), PVSM, VSM, Minister of Tourism, Government of Uttaranchal

Q. Uttaranchal has immense tourism potential. How is the state government planning to exploit that?

A. It is the state government's endeavour to place Uttaranchal on the tourism map of the world as one of the leading tourist destinations, and to make the name of the State synonymous with tourism. To achieve this vision, the government is planning to develop the manifold tourism related resources of the State in an eco- friendly manner and with the active participation of the private sector and the local host communities. The aim is to develop tourism as a major source of employment and income and revenue generation so that it becomes a pivot of the economic and social development in the State. In fact, because of this forward looking and pragmatic tourism policy, the state has won the National Tourism Award for Best Practices.

Q. You mentioned eco-tourism. In a Himalayan State like Uttaranchal, it is quite important. How do you plan to promote eco-tourism?

A. Eco tourism is at the heart of Uttaranchal's tourism policy. The ecology of the Himalayas is fragile and has to be preserved and Uttaranchal, which is blessed with nature's bounty, plans to go ahead keeping this in mind. We plan to involve private sector in furthering our cause. As far as eco-tourism is concerned, one of our focus areas is golf, apart from trekking, nature walks, etc. Golf has big potential to not only to attract tourists internationally in a big way but also to develop a region, at the same time keeping it green. Golf combines ecology-friendly practices with leisure. The state thus, with private sector participation, is embarking on an environmentally-sustainable and financially feasible plan. We are planning to open a number of golf courses in various parts of the state, in addition to the existing ones. One such initiative is being taken near Kashipur where requisite land is being converted into an 18-hole golf course. Not only will it keep the area green but will also provide an economic and social impetus to the region.

Q. In what way?

A. A golf course cannot come up in isolation. A number of facilities have to be there to make it viable. A market has to be developed in terms of tourist attractions and tourist traffic. Only then, the people will come there. If the people are coming, an infrastructure has to be developed to house them and cater to their needs. I am talking in terms of facilities like connectivity, accommodation, apart from physical and social infrastructure. All this means work for the people and increase in facilities for the region too. Also, local actors will be kept in mind while doing this activity. We will take immense care in seeing to it that any such facility is in tune with ecological balance so as the impact of the activities is positive all through.

Q. In what kind of places are you planning such golf courses?

A. Well, the places will be chosen keeping in mind the existing infrastructure services, such as surface, and local transportation, sanitation, medical facilities, power, water supply and telecommunication. The executors of the project will also be expected to suggest measures for improving their efficiency and adequacy with reference to the project. Also, we will ascertain and suggest linkages with relevant tourist circuits in the region.

Q. What are the parameters defined by the government for these projects?

A. It is necessary that those tourism infrastructure facilities required around the identified land are present for the project to be successful. These would include aspects like multi-modal access, wayside amenities, art and culture-related infrastructure, telecommunications, electricity, package tour operations and guide services. etc. Also, in each area, the potential visitor segments vis-à-vis tourism resources of the identified land and tourist arrivals at nearby tourist destinations will be analysed, and the project executor will have to suggest strategy for multinational marketing to attract domestic and foreign tourists.

(Tourism - Harnessing economic & social development in Uttaranchal, FE.B, 16.05.05, S20)

The Uttaranchal Tourism Development Board is targeting the south and west to drive domestic tourism. On the international front, the focus is on arrivals from Germany, the UK and France.

Mr Arun Srivastava, Director (Marketing and Publicity), Uttaranchal Tourism Development Board, said that the infrastructure facilities, particularly air, rail and road connectivity are being developed. A study on the feasibility of a mountain airline is being undertaken, he said. This airline will connect the Himalayan states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal. Air Deccan has started daily flights between Delhi and Dehradun. He said that Pantnagar, another key town in the Kumaon district, would be connected by Air Deccan to New Delhi by the year-end. The work on the development of three more airstrips at Naini Saini, Guacher and Chinyalisaur is on. (Uttaranchal tourism targets South, B.L.C, 30.07.05, S20)

Bihar

Enthused with the new set up under Governor Buta Singh the Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation (BSTDC) recently signed an agreement with a Kerala based Ayurvedic and Naturopathy treatment centre. As per the agreement Healing Veda, a renowned name in this field will set up two centres, one at Rajgir and another at Bodh Gaya. These two Buddhist pilgrimage centres draw the largest number of tourists in Bihar. The Ayurvedic treatment centre would provide rejuvenating massage and body purification anti-stress, beauty care, anti-ageing, spine and neck care body and mind relaxation therapies to the foreign as well as domestic tourists. (A massage from Kerala to spice up Bihar tourism, Amarnath Tewary, TPD, 16.05.05, S20)

Jharkhand

After the recent spate of looting of tourists in Jharkhand, particularly close to Netarhat hill resort and Betla forests, Jharkhand state tourism department and state police have finally decided to form an elite force meant exclusively for protection of tourists visiting the state.

The special force would be called State Tourist Protection Force (STPF) and the decision to form the force has been taken by the police brass, in principle. Efforts are on to give the proposal definite shape. Three families from Howrah were looted twice consecutively by armed miscreants, on their way to Netarhat hill resort from Betla forests. The tourists were robbed of cash, valuables and even their clothes. A bank employee and his family were looted while touring Sita Falls area, some time back. In May, renowned Bengali cinema artiste, Ms Rupa Ganguly and her associates were looted by armed miscreants while returning from McLuskieganj. A senior police officer said that the elite force would be given special training to exert extreme control and would be sensitive to needs of "guests of the state". (Special force for Jharkhand tourists, Dipankar Bose, TS.D, 23.10.05, S20)

Haryana

The Haryana Government has constituted a six-member committee to work out the modalities of setting up wayside modern utility services along the highways, so as to facilitate those either visiting the State or passing through it. It was decided that the wayside utility services would include petrol pumps, rest rooms, eating joints, cyber cafe and STD booths. (Haryana wayside services plan, BL.B, 05.05.05, S20)

Twenty farmhouses in Haryana (most of them located in the vicinity of Delhi) are offering a taste of the bucolic life to city bred. The recreation package includes pastoral activities like cattle feeding, pottery classes, mulching, folk dances, puppet shows, rides in tractors and bullock carts. A tourist who is keen on getting an ethnic experience, however, need not compromise on any of the modern amenities. The rooms and cottages, which are available at around Rs 2,000 per couple per day, are equipped with all facilities. The idea, which was initiated about two years ago, is finding more and more takers. All the twenty farm-houses are privately-owned and as per a senior tourism official, the government's job is "only that of a facilitator". Not only are the farms doing well for themselves, but they are also providing employment opportunities to people in the surrounding villages. More and more states are trying to replicate the success. (Howzzat! Farmhouse tourism from Haryana, Dinker Vashisht & Rahul Kumar, FE.C, 21.05.05, S20)

The Chairman of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (Intach), Mr S.K. Mishra, praised the Haryana Government for showing keen interest in holding heritage festivals in the State on the lines of neighbouring Punjab. "It was the success of the heritage festivals at Amritsar, Kapurthala and Patiala that Haryana Government has responded in a positive manner to initiate similar festivals in the State too," Mr Mishra said. He said a festival could be held either at Pinjore or at Surajgarh, adding the heritage festivals being held in Punjab had given a fillip to the cultural infrastructure and also helped in promotion of tourism. (Haryana keen on heritage fairs, BL.B, 17.02.06, S20 / D11)

Punjab

While Union Ministry for Civil Aviation is engaged in preparing a blue-print to put the State on the international flights circuit, the Punjab government is all set to chalk out a road map to boost religious tourism keeping in view the tremendous potential within its boundaries as well in the neighbouring states, which has remained untapped so far. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said that the state government was seriously contemplating to develop religious tourism circuit of Sikh shrines, connecting Anandpur Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib, Takht Sri Damdama Sahib with the holy Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. This would enable the devotees, especially those from abroad to undertake their pilgrimage without wasting time, money and energy. The Chief Minister said that though Punjab could not compete with its neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan to offer opportunities in leisure tourism, the state was exploring ways and means to promote leisure tourism, through the public-private partnerships. (Punjab Govt. all set to boost religious tourism, Sarabjit Pandher, TH.D, 16.05.05, S20 / D20e)

While the Union Ministry for Tourism has given its consent to projects worth Rs. 23 crore submitted by the Punjab government for development of tourist destinations and religious circuits, the state's Tourism

department has decided to organise a conclave in the second week of April. Ambika Soni was quoted as directing her emphasis that in view of the increasing traffic at Raja Sansi Airport and Wagah Border in Amritsar, special focus on development of these sites be articulated through establishing a Wagah development authority, which was under active consideration in the Government of India.

The main points and agenda for this unique meeting, aimed at promoting interstate co-operation, would include tax structure, levies on tourist transport vehicles, existing circuits, destinations, viability of interstate circuits, joint overseas marketing and funding, NRI participation in local projects, role of private and public sectors, publicity and success stories from the participating states. Mr. Kang said that the Union Government has approved a destination project under which Rs. 5-crore each had been earmarked for development of Amritsar, Wagah and Patiala. Under the scheme all tourist spots within the radius of 25 kms from the district headquarters would be renovated. (Punjab to organise tourism conclave of Northern States, TH.D, 06.03.06, S20)

Himachal Pradesh

The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry has suggested that the Himachal Government should increase its budgetary allocation for tourism promotion from the current Rs. 5.15 crores. The Chamber has also proposed that the State Government should set up a Committee to monitor ground level implementation of policy decisions taken for tourism development. The Committee should function in a time-bound manner and should be empowered to take major decisions.

Need for better air link: In order to increase the number of international tourists to the State, PHDCCI spokesman Yashwinder Dogra has urged that terminal and ground support facilities be upgraded to international standards at Shimla, Kullu and Dharamshala. Also, Sundernagar be developed as a major hub for air connectivity, the proposals for which are already under consideration of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Focus on new destinations: There is an urgent need to develop a master plan for tourism in the State focusing on upgradation of existing destinations and identification and development of new destinations, keeping in mind that the construction that takes place should be in tune with the natural environment of the hills.

PHDCCI has urged the State Government to collaborate with the Union Ministry of Tourism to identify high tourism potential sites and initiate an exercise for developing world-class infrastructure including cleanliness, link roads, approach roads, toilets and parking. International level signboards be put up on important roads and highways for which funding may be sought from the Union Ministry of Tourism. Himachal Pradesh should emulate the models of Austria and Scotland, where the local population has a major source of earning from the beauty of their mountains and environment, it further suggested. (A roadmap for faster development of tourism in Himachal Pradesh, TH.D, 03.05.05, S20)

India's largest tourism project, which entails an investment of \$500 million and financed by the great grandson of Henry Ford is off the blocks. The Himachal Pradesh government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Himalayan Ski Village (HSV) Company with HSV saying the ski village in the Dhauladhar mountain ranges above Manali would open business in three years. HSV is hoping that all permissions required would be settled by the end of 2005. The project's first phase involves a \$155 million investment, in which the village and skiing facilities would be completed with 250 hotel rooms and ski-lift equipment. In the second phase, 350 more hotel rooms and additional villas would be added. The village will be situated at an altitude of 9,200 feet, about 3000 feet above Shuru village, which is 3 kilometres from Manali. (Himachal ski project off the blocks, IE.D, 28.10.05, S20)

At the heart of the conflict is a \$150 million Himalayan Ski Village (HSV), slated to come up on the outskirts of Shuru and Prini, two villages in Manali. The resort has pitted the local oracles against the maverick Iskcon devotee. Representatives of nearly 300 Kullu deities will congregate for a "Badi Jagati Puch (grand convention)" to decide the fate of the \$300-million venture. The ski blizzard has been raging for almost two months now ever since the deal was inked. HSV demanded water rights from the streams and grazing land, which the villagers resisted. Other contentious issues include environmental degradation felling and fears that use of chemicals to preserve snow on the slopes for longer period could be hazardous. The resort, which Ford has

promised will give Swiss destinations a run for their money, will be spread across 100 acres. (Gods to decide ski resort fate, Raveena Aulakh, HT.D, 16.02.06, S20/H12)

The “gods” have spoken. Alfred Ford cannot make his \$500-million Himalayan Ski Village.

Devis and devtas of Kullu valley gathered to pass a judgment on Ford and his ambitious plans for a ski resort in this scenic region. And they were clearly not impressed with either the Ford scion’s grand venture or his frantic claims of being a Hindu. Ever since Ford announced his project for the area, propelled adequately by local politicians, the region has been ravaged by a fierce debate that has pitted profit against piety.

‘In the jagati (congregation of gods), we had invited the various devtas and devis of the valley. Over 90% of the about 175 deities who had come here were against the proposed ski village,” Singh said triumphantly. Singh further remarked. “The gods of the region have given their view. There is no platform above the jagati and at least at the religious level the verdict is final.” Going a step further, Singh said that “each of the deities” had been spoken to and the view on the project being inimical to the interest of the people was unanimous. The deities apparently also said they would leave the place and the people will have to live without their blessings if the go-ahead was given for the ski plan. The jagati was called after a gap of 36 years, the last being held in 1970 when the valley was hit by a famine. Jagatis are held only to decide in case of exceptional situations. (Kullu ‘gods’ veto Ford’s \$500-million ski village plan, Jagadish Bhat, TOI.D, 17.02.06, S20 / H12)

An acute water crisis is likely to grip Shimla in the months to come. For the first time in the history of the town, there was no snowfall during winter. There were no rains as well. After long dry spell, the capital of Himachal Pradesh seems to be heading towards a major drinking water crisis. All the major sources of drinking water are already on the verge of drying up. The impact of this has already been felt on the water supply to some of the areas of Shimla. These areas receive water for just three or sometimes four days a week. This is just the month of February and there is concern as to what would happen in peak summers. (Shimla to face acute water crisis, Jai Sood, TPD, 24.02.06, S20)

Shopping malls are to soon come up at two popular halting spots on the busy Kalka-Shimla national highway and later at other places along the highways running through Himachal Pradesh. Pillars will be raised on both sides of the winding highway and the double-storied structures will come up above the road. They will have a shopping complex, restaurant and bar, among other facilities for travellers. (Malls set to lure travellers to Himachal highway, Baldev Chauhan, AA.D, 10.03.06, S20)

Madhya Pradesh

A controversy seems to be brewing between the Archaeological Society of India (ASI) and the Madhya Pradesh government over the systematic environmental damage being done to the 2,300-year-old Buddhist stupa at Sanchi (Raisen), a 90 minute drive from the state capital. The world heritage site is frequented by thousands of foreign tourists, mainly Buddhists, round the year. State government officials complain that glaring cracks have appeared at the base of the stupa due to the ravages of weather over the decades. Much of this has been the result of leakage of rain water into the innards of the monument. The need for immediate measures to arrest the deterioration has been made in an official report submitted by the collector of Raisen. The Archaeological Society of India, unfortunately, has chosen to make light of the matter on the plea that the state government had no business to make their findings public without first discussing it with them. The collector’s findings, they claim, is a gross exaggeration. In reality, there is no cause for alarm. (Sanchi stupa base cracks, Sudhir K Singh, AA.D, 30.09.05, S20 / D20d)

Chhattisgarh

Unable to check “intrusion” by tuskers into its territory from adjoining Jharkhand State, the Chhattisgarh Government plans to make an “elephant homeland” in its forest areas for the migrants who have crossed over here in search of food and also drinking water. These elephants have wrecked havoc in many parts of the State. Over hundred migrant elephants have unleashed terror by destroying houses and crops in many areas of Jaspur, Sarguja and Korba districts of Chhattisgarh. Mining and felling of trees in forests has forced the

elephants to move to other areas for food. And in their search, they enter even the residential areas, destroy mud houses, crops and even sometimes pose threat to people's life.

The local administration often launches awareness drives to educate the people on how they could protect themselves from the elephants. Besides, the villagers chase away the tusked by showing torch light and beating of drums. People are told to watch elephant's movement, arrange bonfire and burst fire crackers to keep them away.

The administration has to pay compensation to the people whose property gets destroyed by the tusked. Authorities earlier requested Jharkhand forest officials to make arrangements for the return of these tusked. Now the Chhattisgarh Government wants to make elephant homeland for finding a permanent solution to the problem. The State Government had, earlier this year, written to the Central Government in this regard. But, the officials of the Central Government turned down the proposal saying that the migration of elephants was for a short time and therefore the proposal for the homeland was not practical. The State Government is again going to take up the issue with the Centre with some modification in the proposal. (Chhattisgarh plans elephant homeland, Shivanand Shukla, TPD, 28.09.05, S20)

The Chhattisgarh Government would shortly announce its new tourism policy, giving huge incentives to investors that will include complete waiver of stamp duty on purchase of land and sales tax, besides waiver of State levies, said Mr Brij Mohan Agarwal, Minister of Tourism.

He said the State's tourism board would create huge land banks and allocate land to investors proposing to come to Chhattisgarh on concessional rates that attract zero stamp duty. The land banks will come into creation in the next 5-6 months as the State has received proposal from various segments of industries to the tune of Rs 40,000 crore. (Chhattisgarh to announce tax waiver to promote tourism, BL.B, 10.02.06, S20)

S21 Jammu & Kashmir

Tourism in Kashmir, which is on the path of revival, is set to get a boost. The Jammu and Kashmir Cable Car Corporation (JKCCC) is making the second phase of the 'Gulmarg Gondola' operational, taking it to the heights of the Afarwat peak. The second phase from Kangdoori to Afarwat came up in record time. The State Government is hoping to attract skiers and adventure tourists from around the world. The 2.5-km ropeway is complete and the trials are through. It will connect the bowl-shaped Kongdoori Valley with the 4,390-metre Afarwat.

Joint venture: The Gulmarg Gondola, as the ropeway project is known, is a joint venture between the State Government and a French company, Poma Glaski. Engineers from the State and the company have been working in huge drifts of snow to erect towers and lay cables in the area close to the Line of Control. The so-far deserted area overlooks Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The French company built the only other cable car in Kashmir, connecting the Gulmarg ski resort to Kongdoori at a height of 3,930 m. Work on the Gulmarg system was delayed by more than eight years after it was abandoned in 1990 by French technicians when two engineers were briefly abducted by militants. It was completed in 1998. The Afarwat project, due to be completed last year, was delayed owing to bad weather. (The Gulmarg Gondola aloft, Shujaat Bukhari, BL.C, 01.04.05, S21)

On the shores of picturesque Dal Lake, a host of intellectuals, bureaucrats and policy-makers have converged to discuss future of a beautiful but far-flung region - Ladakh. They released a vision document 'Ladakh 2025'. The vision document aims at dispelling confusion and uncertainty among the Ladakhi people who are adopting new lifestyles, practices and social mores leaving behind the century's old traditions and culture. Jigmit Thakpa, who has authored the document adds, "Need of the hour is to bring an immediate stop to the shocking deterioration of our rich heritage by developing an appropriate set of preventive measures." The rapid decline of natural resources such as water is another cause for concern for Ladakhi intelligentsia. 'Pollution, scarcity of natural resources is becoming common, even certain indigenous species of plants and animals are at the verge of extinction,' Thakpa said. (Vision 2025: A Ladakh roadmap, Khursheed Wani, TPD, 10.05.05, S21)

"I will continue to live on water till I die," says Mohammad Altaf (65). Even as the authorities step up their efforts to rehabilitate the people living on the world-famous Dal Lake by giving them free plots of land, the elders of the Hanji community assert they will live only on the water. The community is fighting the most difficult battle of its history, to save its identity.

The Hanjis are one of the most important features of state's life, a section of people living in boats on and around the lakes, streams and rivers. They are also found on the Wular and Anchar Lakes and the Jhelum.

Maximum stake: The shrinking of the Dal Lake from 20 miles to approximately 12 sq km in the last half-century has been a cause of concern. While this has attracted much attention, not much has been heard about this unique community, which has the maximum stake in saving the lake. Many blamed the Hanjis for polluting the lake and also held it directly responsible for the shrinking lake area. The State Government worked out a rehabilitation plan, which is expected to help save the lake too. Of the 6000 families living on the Dal, 1200 have already been shifted and more are to follow though they want to continue with their business like renting houseboats or plying the shikara (tourist boats). But, for the proud Hanji community, the displacement from their centuries-old habitat is only the beginning of their troubles. In the interiors of the Dal, a complete culture lives and thrives on the famous water body. There are large-sized houseboats for family functions. There is economic self-sufficiency. For instance, at Karpura, an interior pocket, there are floating vegetable gardens, which feed not only the entire Hanji community but also the cities since excess produce is sold. The people who grow vegetables, collect water-nuts, collect wood from water-bodies are the much-noticed shikara owners. Many consumer goods can also be bought from the "floating bazaars". Thus, to a large extent, life on the Dal is self-sustaining.

Post-1989, the houseboats have recorded lowest occupancy levels whereas the hotels around the Dal are full. The outbreak of turmoil in the state, most of the hotels were taken on rent by the estates department to house government employees as the area was considered risk free.

The State Government's proposal for a proper sewage system by providing septic tanks to toilets of the houseboats failed, as there was no institutional back up from the authorities. The system was discontinued because of repeated leaks from the tanks. This increased pollution in the water body by raising the phosphoric content in the lake, thereby encouraging weed growth. In recent years, concrete structures to sell handicrafts or textiles have been built around the lake.

Declining tourism: Even though the community elders are least enthusiastic about moving out, the younger lot feel otherwise. The tourist industry has declined and the years of militancy dealt a deathblow to the Hanji community with falling tourist inflow even though the area within the Dal has been the most peaceful. In 2003, the State Government provided the Hanji community loans to re-build their tourism-related infrastructure. The interest rate was fixed and amount was given according to the category of houseboats or shikaras owned by the Hanji community.

The State Government levies a 15% tax on the total amount earned from each tourist who stays for a night on the houseboat. This, according to houseboat owners, is too high considering the tough times in recent years. The expenditure on maintenance of houseboats has also increased given the high levels of water pollution.

Need for help: Ecological changes also have an impact on the community. Strong winds during the first fortnight of April damaged a number of houseboats. There was little support from the authorities though the tourist season was hardly a month away. Community members also worry that they may be left behind in terms of social and human indicators. For instance literacy levels, especially among women, are abysmal (12 %). At the moment when a centuries-old lifestyle is threatened due to unplanned urbanisation, there is a need for suitable policy intervention to sort out the problems of the community. Civil society also needs to help the community save their culture and also help it attain better human and social indicators. (A lake endangered, Luv Puri, TH.B, 15.05.05, S21)

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on his first visit to Ladakh after assuming office, called for developing the region as a new tourist hub of Jammu and Kashmir. Addressing a function to rename Leh's airport after Kushok Bakula Rimpoche, a Buddhist monk considered the architect of modern Leh, Singh hoped that air connectivity would bring more "tourists, investors and scholars to this remote corner of the world". The PM

asserted that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh would benefit greatly from this modernisation. "Our government is committed to the modernisation of our infrastructure across the length and breadth of the vast subcontinent, Singh said, adding that this would "ensure that the emotional and economic integration of the country is better enabled." He said that the Ladakh region would see better schools, hospitals and urban facilities soon. Responding to Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and his deputy Mangat Ram Sharma's demand for more flights to Ladakh, the PM said that all "obstacles" in the path of connectivity to this mountain-locked region would be removed so that its full tourism potential could be exploited. Expansion of health care and education were top priority for the government and Jammu & Kashmir would also benefit from this. (PM calls for making Ladakh a tourist hub, TOI.B, 11.06.05, S21)

To showcase Kashmir as a safe destination for tourists all over the world, Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chowdary announced a series of measures. Rs. 40 crores has been sanctioned to boost the tourism industry and rebuild the infrastructure in the State. Apart from Rs. 16 crores given as soft loan to houseboat, hotel and horse owners, the Government has sanctioned Rs. 8.58 crores for revamping the Institute of Skiing at Gulmarg. Another Rs. 20 crores has been earmarked for rural tourism, development authorities and new circuits.

The Amarnath Yatra circuit would be developed exclusively by the Centre. The other circuits would come at the banks of Jhelum and Shikhodi in Jammu. Stating that the Centre would take up a comprehensive campaign throughout the world to present Kashmir as "a safe destination," (Putting Kashmir back on the tourist map, Shujaat Bukhari, TH.C, 11.07.05, S21)

Although tourists are streaming in from different parts of the world, the cultural and ancient sites here are crying for funds. Many of them are decaying and crumbling despite local efforts. The city's cynosure, a crumbled nine-storey palace of the 16th century that towers over the Leh old quarters — itself points to the threat faced by similar structures in this cold desert. There are new constructions in the town, which are turning into tourist attractions. The Shanti Stupa built by the Japanese has become the most famous tourist attraction; its architecture is different from the Ladakhi style. (Ladakh monuments cry for renovation, Luv Puri, TH.B, 21.08.05, S21)

A Rs. 298 crore plan to clean up the Dal lake has been cleared by the Environment and Forests Ministry and now awaits the Union Cabinet's nod. The project is the biggest ever lake conservation plan to be taken up by the ministry and the first major package to boost tourism in J&K. It is to be completed within five years from the day of commencement. Unlike the ministry's other lake conservation programmes where the Centre provides 70 % of the funds, the Dal lake project will be fully-funded by the Centre. The shikaras, an integral part of the Dal lake, will also get a makeover. They will be redesigned, made eco-friendly and "a new sanitation system developed by IIT-Rourkee will be installed". The project also envisages the development of the area around the lake, on the lines of river front improvement in London and New York. (Rs 298 cr for Dal clean-up, Chetan Chauhan, HT.D, 03.09.05, S21)

After a gap of over three years, French heli-skiing expert Sylvain Saudan is back in Jammu and Kashmir to revive the adventure sport during the coming winter. Sources in tourism department said that Mr Saudan is working out arrangements in consultation with the concerned officials. He plans to start operations in February next year. He also met Chief Minister Mufti Muhammad Sayeed to apprise him of the plan to revive heli-skiing that attracted hundreds of tourists from Europe and other countries. (Try heli-skiing in Valley, Yusuf Jameel, AA.D, 24.10.05, S21)

The shikaras may stay, but Dal Lake's famous flowers and vegetables may soon become a memory. The showpiece of Srinagar may soon be listed among UNESCO's list of world heritage sites if Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz has his way. But a major hurdle that could acquire political overtones is the 6,000-odd families who grow vegetables and flowers on the banks who will have to be relocated. Picking up from where he left off during his stint as environment minister in 1997 at cleaning up and conserving the best-known landmark in the Valley, Soz says rehabilitation plans for inhabitants on the lake have also been worked out. The people have also been sounded out about evacuating the lake and are not averse to the idea, says Soz. (Saifuddin Soz plans to put Dal Lake on Unesco map, Mohua Chatterjee, TOI.D, 21.02.06, S21)

S30 Western India

Maharashtra

The 18th century Sion Fort has divided the protectors of heritage into two camps. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is positioned on one side and the Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee (MHCC) on the other. Two years after the MHCC cleared a slum rehabilitation scheme at the foothills of the Sion Fort, the ASI is crying foul. It has finally woken up to the fact that the Sion Fort is a Grade I heritage structure that needs to be protected. This is after two buildings are already up and ready for occupation while a third is under construction. In a recent letter to the MHCC, the ASI has sought a stay on the construction. The ASI says that since the fort is a 1929 notified heritage monument, no construction can be allowed within 300 metres of it. Apart from the buildings, it has also objected to a proposed garden, municipal market and primary school in the vicinity of the fort.

In 1999, when the state government, who owns the fort, asked the MHCC for clearance for the slum project, the committee approved since the fort was already overrun by 30-year-old slums and had degenerated into a huge open-air toilet. An ASI official in charge of the heritage monuments in Mumbai said that the fort had escaped attention so far because Mumbai was part of the Aurangabad circle. It was only in December last year that Mumbai, along with eight other districts in Maharashtra, was bifurcated into a new ASI centre. (Heritage Vs Heritage At Sion Fort; Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee, ASI Clash Over Rehab Scheme, Clara Lewis, TOI.M, 27.04.05, S30 / D20d)

In 1998, Maharashtra decided to compete with Goa, a celebrated non-corporate international tourism brand as it was felt that the latter was unable to effectively manage the huge inflow of tourist arrivals. Maharashtra strategy was to look at its own coastal Konkan district of Sindhudurg, just north of Goa. It was just like Goa — picturesque, abounded in clean beaches, where, because of phosphorescence, waves glow on a full moon night, and provided a sense of tranquillity. So, why has Sindhudurg, which was officially given the “Tourism Only” status (banning any other activity) remained starved of money-spinning tourism? Why does it continue to be backward with a per capita income of under Rs. 3,000? (Even this economy is sustained by money orders from its migrants working in Mumbai.) Also why are tourism facilities virtually frozen at the pre-1988 levels? Goa, on the other hand, continues with its tourist arrivals of two million per year, higher than the local population of 1.24 million.

Narayan Rane, who hailed from Sindhudurg and aware of its true tourism potential when he became Chief Minister in 1988, formulated the policy, but it was not implemented by the next Government with the vigour it deserved.

But things could be looking up soon as this “Tourism Only” policy will be given a boost, according to Minister of State for Tourism, Suresh Shetty. A ‘new tourism policy on the anvil would intensify work on all fronts’ and ‘the lost opportunities regained’. The ‘Deccan Odyssey’ is being better marketed internationally so that the Konkan gets more attention.

Obstacles: Lack of movement on the tourism policy and stringent coastal zone regulations (CRZ) have kept away leading five-star hotel groups. In fact they have opted out of plans inspite of depositing Rs. 2 crores for the 60 to 80 acre seaside plots in Shiroda, Midbav and Mochamad villages for their resorts. Officials are behind them to revive their plans but CRZ laws are a barrier.

An airport near Parole has remained a non-starter and so has a subsidiary to the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) to focus on Sindhudurg. Now, only a desultory committee with the collector overlooks local perspectives, which does not amount to much. But some local efforts are on, one being a tourism co-operative which provides beds in tents and lately, a “bed and breakfast” scheme in local homes. Another is a “Backwaters Festival” to popularise three creeks as backwaters. Interestingly, politicians run both.

In 1999, an interesting experiment was kicked off. Busloads of people were taken to Sindhudurg and people asked to host them. The idea was to help them understand the huge potential of tourism, which can create at least two lakh jobs. Soon enough, some 80 households registered themselves as hosts to offer inexpensive beds and clean toilets to visitors on a regular basis, but then a problem emerged. They were asked to pay

“commercial” rates for electricity consumed, instead of the cheaper domestic tariff, which ended up diluting the hosts’ enthusiasm. Sixteen pairs of trains on the Konkan Railway, snaking through the region have not significantly boosted tourist arrivals as the infrastructure/facilities are inadequate. Hopeful locals who invested in the railways’ bonds and parted with land to make the railway possible now acknowledge that expected growth has not come in its wake. (Whither Sindhudurg? Mahesh Vijapurkar, TH.B, 29.05.05, S30)

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) has come up with some exciting offers aimed at corporate under the Deposit Scheme package. Any organization that ties up with MTDC can avail of discounts on all MTDC properties. Employees can choose from a range of destinations — the pristine beaches of Tarkarli, Ganpatipule and Harihareshwar or heritage sites such as Ajanta, Ellora, Karla and Lonar crater Or sanctuaries such as Pench and Tadoba to forts at Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. (It’s raining packages, TH.C, 24.09.05, S30)

Attempts by an advertising Company to delist Mahalaxmi precincts in Mumbai from the list of heritage sites failed as the Supreme Court has ruled that there could not be any doubt that it falls in the grade-III heritage site classification, prohibiting erection of any hoarding there.

Despite anomalies in the list prepared by the Maharashtra government a Bench comprising Justice Ruma Pal and Justice AR Lakshmanan said on October 21 that “Mahalaxmi precincts is indeed a listed heritage precinct.” This order was passed by the Bench while dismissing a petition filed by Mass Holdings Pvt Ltd challenging a Bombay High Court order allowing Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai to remove its hoarding from the area. However, after the pronouncement of the order, counsel for the appellant mentioned before the Court that it has approached Maharashtra Heritage Conservation Committee (MHCC), which has agreed to consider its representation to obtain a ‘no objection certificate to their hoarding’. (SC: Mahalaxmi precincts a heritage site, Dhananjay Mahapatra, TOI.D, 26.10.05, S30 / D20d)

Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) started its services of the open-deck tourism buses last week. The bus takes tourists through Mumbai in the calm of night. The advantage is that Mumbai’s busy business districts through which the bus winds its way are empty during the evening. The two open-decked buses, Nilambari and Vibhavari, have attracted the interest of not just international but also domestic tourists who queue up to watch some of the popular heritage places. (Nightseeing in Mumbai; MTDC’s open-deck buses take tourists around Mumbai, Sulekha Nair, FE.C, 13.12.05, S30)

The restoration of Ajanta and Ellora is being funded jointly by the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the government of Maharashtra. “The Japanese Bank has provided a soft loan of Rs 81 crore in the first phase of the Ajanta Ellora project and Rs 300 crore in the second phase,” says Abhay Yavalkar, joint MD, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation. Besides caves in and around Aurangabad, the Bank is also funding an irrigation project in Bhandardhara and Elepanta Caves in Mumbai, et al. (Breathing life into frescoes, FE.D, 19.02.06, S30 / D20d)

There seems to be a rush of healthcare providers flocking to Mumbai to set up super-speciality hospitals. Work has started on a 1,000-bed multi-speciality hospital located close to the Sahar International Airport on the outer fringes of Mumbai. The estimated Ps 360 crore hospital is coming up on the BMC’s (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) unfinished cancer project being developed by the Vizag based Seven Hills Healthcare Ltd. The hospital is scheduled to be completed by late 2007. Only last month, the Apollo Hospitals Group committed Rs 400 crore towards establishing two tertiary hospitals. A proposed heart hospital, the pet project of cardiac surgeon late Dr Nitu Mandke and currently under the aegis of Mr Anil Ambani was scheduled to be completed this year. With a three-and-a-half year-old hospital in Mumbai, Wockhardt Hospitals Group is also looking for an opportunity to set up its second hospital in the city. (For hospital groups, it’s Destination Mumbai, P T Jyothi Datta, BL.B, 21.03.06, S30 / D20f)

Rajasthan

Rajasthan has called up on the Centre to sanction at the earliest proposals worth Rs. 60 crores for launching tourism projects during 05-06 to enable the State Government to take up the works at the beginning of the year. The projects include renovation of places of tourist interest and extension of 12 airstrips. The Minister

of State for Tourism, Usha Punia, while raising the demand at a review meeting. (Centre asked to clear proposals, TH.D, 08.05.05, S30)

The NCR Planning Board will soon be setting up its first class township in the region. It will be developed at Neemrana in Rajasthan, 110 km west of Delhi, on the Neemrana-Shahjahanabad highway. Member Secretary of the board Dr P.K. Mishra says that the Neemrana Township is a pilot project to kick-start the board's move to develop at least one world class town in each of the constituent states. 'The basic ideas behind the project is to try and ease the population and economic pressure on Delhi and disperse it to the neighbouring states,' says Dr Mishra.

Rajasthan was the first state to come up with a project recommendation and has even identified the site while Haryana and UP will be next in line. Neemrana was the choice because it is on the highway and has easy access. (Neemrana town will ease capital burden, Esha Roy, IE.D, 21.05.05, S30)

There has always been a curious inertia on the part of the Vasundhara Raje government when it came to addressing the issue of Sati with the rigour that the law demanded. Whether this was prompted by political expediency or the personal belief of its Chief Minister is difficult to say. In January 2004, when a lower court acquitted all the accused for glorifying the Roop Kanwar Sati in 1987, the state government was expected to challenge the verdict. It responded with silence. More recently, the Jaipur Development Authority actually named a new township as Shree Rani Sati Nagar, right under the nose of the government. Nobody in Jaipur's corridors of power discerned anything amiss. Now comes the brainwave from the Rajasthan Tourism Development Authority apparently with the full encouragement of the state's tourism ministry of packaging Rajasthan's Sati sites as tourist destinations. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, is unambiguous in recognising as a crime not just Sati, but the glorification of it. It bans "the supporting, justifying or propagating" of the practice of Sati "in any manner". Against this legal backdrop, you have a publication brought out by a Rajasthan state government authority gushing: "There is not a spot in the state where women had not committed Sati". This actually amounts to the state-sponsored promotion of the cult. (Incredible Rajasthan, Packaging Sati sites as tourist spots amounts to state-sponsored promotion of the cult, IE.D, 01.06.05, S30)

On April 15, people living near Roopsagar Lake in Udaipur were shocked to see bulldozers ripping apart its dry bed. "When I asked the contractor, I was told a 80-foot (about 24 metres) wide road was to be carved out in the peta (bed) of the lake," says Ramlal Vaishnav, ex-councillor of Pahada area, where the lake is situated. The news spread like wildfire through the area. An irate crowd assembled at the site and got the work stopped. "This talaab is very important for us because when there is water in it, our wells are full. If any construction takes place here, our hand pumps will dry up," says Naresh Vaishnav, a resident. On April 18, the residents gathered again and took to the streets and vowed to stop any construction in Roopsagar. It then came to light that construction was taking place in almost every water-body that had dried up in Udaipur. Similar to the case of Roopsagar was that of Naila talaab whose embankment was cut to make way for a road. But what was glaring about these two incidents was that not only did the 'development activities' violate the city's master plan but also an order of the Rajasthan High Court (RHC). On August 2, 2004, RHC had directed the state government to make a plan to restore the catchment areas of all the water bodies in Rajasthan. The directions were further passed to all the districts.

Why then did the Urban Improvement Trust (UIT) of Udaipur along with the district administration proceed with an activity that ran contrary to RHC's directions? "On April 16, I came to know that roads were constructed in the low-lying area and I ordered for the removal of whatever construction was going on," says district magistrate Abhay Kumar, who is also the UIT chairperson. He says the roads were being constructed as part of the Asian Development Bank-funded Vasundhara Road Network project. But even the master plan doesn't show the lake can be built over. Further, this land use of the area (from lake to playground) appears to be a recent change included in the Land Use Plan 2022. As late as 1997, these two were shown as water-bodies. Why the change? Explains chief town planner H S Sancheti, "These water-bodies are dry for years and have no value now." But Kumar himself had ordered the irrigation department to restore Roopsagar under the Akal Rahat Karya (drought relief) scheme just 2-3 years ago. The whole affair points to a nexus between the authorities and builders, says Tej Rajdan of the 'Jheel Sanrakshan Samiti', a non-governmental organisation in Udaipur.

Why are Udaipur's lakes drying up? "Among the main reasons are over extraction of water and choking of inlets by building colonies," opines J C Dubey, a hydrologist, who has also worked with the Rajasthan government. But for government officials, there is only one: "Low rainfall during the last decade is the biggest reason for the lakes drying up," claims J N Golani, additional chief engineer, Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). Dubey counters saying the rainfall in Udaipur during the period has never been less than 40 % of the average of 660 millimetre / year. In some years, it has been more than the average but still the water did not reach the lakes. Dubey blames the PHED, which is responsible for supplying water to the city. "After exploiting the lakes up to their basin, the PHED have now put borewells in the bed of these lakes," he says. Even industries such as the Hindustan Zinc Limited (HZL) have put nearly 20 bore wells in the bed of Udaisagar Lake to meet its huge water demand. As a result, the hand pumps in the surrounding villages dried up. On April 27, the villagers surrounding the lake agitated against groundwater extraction from the lake bed. "The tube wells drilled in the bed of these lakes have become permanent conduits for rapid seepage and are resulting in faster losses of surface water storage whenever the lakes are filled with rainwater," says Dubey.

What's the way out? If even just Pichola, Fatehsagar and Badi lakes were full, there would be enough water to meet the demand for a 1 ½ years, he says. After the Roopsagar incident, Sancheti has identified 39 waterbodies in and around the city. The formula for keeping the lakes full is not difficult to find: it is located just 5 kilometres from Udaipur in the form of Jogi ka Talaab. This talaab, which is in the same terrain, and gets the same amount of rainfall as Udaipur, is brimming with water and laughing silently through its lotus flowers. None of the villagers living around it use its water for irrigation. Its inlets and outlets are not suffocated with construction. On top of that, no government body has reached here yet, it is still being managed by the local people, who understand its importance. (Lake Assault, Down to Earth Feature, IE.C, 05.06.05, S30)

A new integrated tourism policy, which will accommodate a more active role for the private sector in infrastructure development, is on the anvil in Rajasthan. The policy would ensure that the State, now almost on top of the heap in tourism in the country, stays put there by diversifying and developing more areas and newer themes other than the "eternal" desert it offers now. The new policy would incorporate plans for increase in number of hotel rooms through setting up land banks, de-classification of land for hotels from the commercial to the industrial category and by creation of a district-wise inventory of tourism circuits. There would be special desert tourism projects and health-tourism. (Rajasthan mulls over new tourism policy, TH.D, 04.09.05, S30)

The Rajasthan government plans to create rural tourism resorts in tribal bases, eco-rural circuits, desert experience projects and health tourism projects to step up foreign tourist arrivals. The decision comes in the wake of the state losing out to states like Kerala.

The initiative is in tune with the recent FICCI-CRISIL study which had warned that "Rajasthan needs to seriously look at recent trends which reveal that the state's share of international tourists is on the decline". "The Ministry of Tourism has accepted the proposals recommended by the study in its eight-point strategy to the government and will go for intense campaigns in days to come. Promotion of medical tourism, integration of all the related projects into the existing circuits, review of the policy framework and proactive steps to attract private investment would put the desert state's tourism sector on a higher platform," State Tourism Minister Usha Punia said. The average period of stay for a foreign tourist in India is 31.2 days, while it is only around 2.5 days in Rajasthan as against more than five days in states like Goa and Kerala. Per-day spends by international and domestic tourists in Rajasthan are Rs 800 and Rs 400 respectively, less than half of the average tourists spend in India. (Rajasthan to step up tourism offerings, IE.C, 06.09.05, S30)

Tourists can once again enjoy elephant rides at the Amber Fort in the Pink City with the Government lifting a ban that was imposed after a rogue elephant killed one person and injured two tourists. The decision to lift the ban was taken at a meeting of senior officials. It was decided that 61 elephants, who were found to be in sound mental and physical health, would be allowed to ferry tourists to the fort. According to sources, the decision was taken after a committee of elephant owners agreed to follow safety norms issued by the State Government. The tourism department had imposed an indefinite ban on elephant rides after a rogue elephant trampled to death a tour escort and injured two Belgian tourists on September 15. Under the new guidelines, the Forest Department will issue identity cards to all mahouts who must have at least three years experience of handling elephants in the Amber premises. (Rajasthan lifts ban on elephant ride, T.P.D, 12.10.05, S30/D20d)

Rajasthan is playing host to a 14 day-long International Hot Air Ballooning Fiesta. Produced and organised by 'Wild in The Woods' and 'E-Factor', it is the first of its kind being held in India. Over 20 balloonists from 11 countries will navigate from Barmer to Jodhpur and Jaipur during the festival. To popularise the sport, free flights, night-glow events and hot air balloon competitions have also been organised. Clearly, the idea is to popularise adventure sports and boost tourism. The diverse terrain of Rajasthan with the Aravalli and Vindhayan hills, the open desert tracts, the vast lakes and rivers, and the wildlife parks are ideal for adventure sports. Little wonder then that it offers exhaustive options - boating in the Chambal river, biking in Shekhawati and Mount Abu, trekking in Sariska-Alwar Amber belt, camping in Pushkar, ballooning in Jaipur, parasailing in the sandy countryside and even water sports in the large lakes. An aerosport project in collaboration with Delhi Tourism Development Corporation and Aerosport Club is underway. And with an International Desert Sport festival in the pipeline travellers can look forward to desert skiing and desert motoring as well. (Simply Adventurous, Kiran Yadav, FE.D, 19.02.06, S20/ D20a)

A long-cherished dream of Rajasthan has come true with the Ministry of Civil Aviation notifying the existing domestic airport at Sanganer as an international airport. The Sanganer airport, granted the status of an international airport on December 29, 2005, is one of the 12 modern airports in the country and 14th international airport where passenger-friendly facilities have been upgraded and modernized by the Airport Authority of India. The terminal building, renovated to give an ethnic Rajasthani architectural look, can accommodate 500 passengers at a time and is equipped with all modern passenger amenities including customs and immigration facilities to handle international chartered flights. The authorities at the airport said that there was a plan to construct a new international terminal building, which would cater to 1000 passengers an hour. (Sanganer airport goes international, TH.D, 22.02.06, S30)

The opulence and grandeur of Rajasthan have always fascinated foreign tourists. Now the desert state has a new, heady concoction to attract visitors — heritage liquor from the royal households. Royal Jagmohan and Royal Kesar Kasturi, the two brands of vintage liquor that have been launched so far, have caught the fancy of visitors from abroad who are even carrying them for future consumption. Seeing the popularity of these drinks that were traditionally brewed in the royal households, three new brands — Royal Chandrahas, Royal Saunf and Royal Mavali — will soon hit the market. (Royal Rajasthan liquor hit with tourists, Anil Sharma, AA.D, 09.03.06, S30)

Gujarat

In line with the it's decision to celebrate year 2006 as Tourism Development Year, the Gujarat government is planning to form Gujarat Tourism Promotion Council (GTPC) for the development of much neglected tourism sector in the state. The basic objective of the council would be to showcase Gujarat as major tourist destination for international as well as domestic tourism and to help state government for the necessary infrastructural development to promote the tourism industry along with proper marketing strategies. (Gujarat to promote tourism in a big way, Nayan Dave, FE.C, 14.07.05, S30)

The residents of modern Champaner-Pavagadh in Panchmahals district of Gujarat are probably unaware of the historical importance of their town. A little over a year ago, Champaner-Pavagadh was given the status of World Heritage Site by UNESCO. According to Karan Grover, the architect who has been working for the last 30 years pushing Champaner-Pavagadh on to the global heritage list, there are 11 kinds of buildings, some of them being mosques, granaries, tombs, helical wells, fort walls and viewing terraces. The tourist trail takes one through the Gebanshah's Vav or step well that is 80 feet deep, Mehdi talao, Vada Talao, water channels, various fortifications, including the Atak Fort, which till today has 83 catapults structures. (On a heritage trail, Latha Venkatraman, TH.B, 25.09.05, S30)

Gujarat tourism will no longer be all about the temple circuit. In 2006, the Year of Tourism, the state itinerary will involve a mix of historical spots pertaining to various religions. Leading the packages is the famous Champaner Fort, a World Heritage site, a settlement put up by the first Muslim rulers in Gujarat. Of the tourist circuits being envisaged is the "Krishna Circuit" with Dwarka at the forefront. Then there is the "Gandhi circuit" including Porbandar, Sabarmati Ashram and Rajkot. Other plans on the anvil, officials said, include sea cruises from Mumbai to Mandvi. (Modi takes history lessons for tourism, Siddhartha Sarma, IE.D, 05.10.05, S30)

The Gujarat Government has appealed to the Centre to extend the tax holidays it offers to the Kutch district for another two years in order to provide further impetus to the industrial activities in the district. "We have put forward a proposal before the Central Government to extend the tax holidays to the Kutch district and that the industrial activity of the State gets further momentum," the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, said here while inaugurating the Welspun City. The Union Government in the public interest exempted certain industrial sector in the district from paying excise duty till December 31, 2005. Gujarat has secured almost 88 percent of the total investment in the country, Mr Modi claimed adding, the Kutch district, has become the epicentre of the industrial activity of the state after the 2001 earthquake. (Gujarat seeks further tax-holiday for Kutch district, BL.B, 29.11.05, S30)

In a bid to further explore tourism potential of Gujarat, the Junagadh district administration has chalked out an action plan worth about Rs 20 crore to lure domestic and foreign tourists. The Junagadh District Collector, Mr Bipin Kumar Srimali, said the local administration has made efforts to provide helicopter services connecting Palitana, Somnath and Junagadh.

Besides, wildlife eco-tourism activities have been planned at Sakkarbag and nature trails at Girnar. During Heritage tourism programme in July, the administration has decided to set up a theme pavilion at Uperkot, seminar on protection and development of archaeological memorial in Junagadh, Mr Srimali said. Mr Srimali said that of the estimated Rs 20-crore project about Rs 7 crore would be as assistance by the Central Government, equal amount would be given by the State Government and the rest would be raised through public participation. (Junagadh chalks out action plan to woo tourism, BL.B, 21.02.06, S30)

S40 Union Territories

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

For years, coral reefs and marine life have helped define the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as an international tourist destination. But when the tsunami struck on December 26 last year, corals were farthest from the minds of the civilian authorities and the defence services engaged in rescue and rehabilitation. As the huge seismic sea waves left vast stretches of destruction on the land, no one had the time or the resources to study the effect of the tsunami on the reefs. Now, however, with the civilian administration and the defence establishment restoring near-normality to the islands after a trying period, the corals are getting a look-in again. In any case, without tourism, the islands cannot attain the pre-tsunami normality.

Sarang Kulkarni of Reef Watch Marine Conservation, with help from the administration, undertook a survey of the coral reefs, nearly two months after the tsunami. In several areas, mostly those not badly affected by the tsunami, the coral reefs were intact. Neil and Havelock showed up a breathtaking range of corals. But Jolly Buoy, ordinarily the biggest attraction for coral lovers, appeared hit.

In a reworking of the tourism strategy, Lieutenant Governor Ram Kapse decided to put the glass-bottomed boats at the Jolly Buoy in the service of the Neil and Havelock islands. Thus, coral reefs will remain an attraction, if not Jolly Buoy. Most of the islands that were damaged by the sea were those that could be directly approached from the south-east, and Havelock was not in this category. While recognising that some of the popular destinations have, at least for the moment, lost their tourism potential, the administration is opening up new destinations, and new avenues at old destinations.

Thus, Havelock, already famed for its white sand beaches, would now offer coral reefs too for the tourists. Baratang Island, which is about 100 km by road from Port Blair, will be promoted more for its mud volcanoes and limestone caves and less for its beaches. (Reefs get a relook, Suresh Nambath, TH.B, 17.04.05, S40)

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are now about three metres closer to the mainland coast than it was pre-tsunami. Some areas of the Islands have gone down by up to one metre.

Discussing the topographical changes due to the December 26 tsunami, Department of Ocean Development Secretary Harsh Gupta said that the tsunami caused the Indian Plate to go under the Burmese Plate. The Burmese coast also moved closer to the Andaman coast by about three metres.

Post-tsunami, clay and silica particles had got deposited on corals in the Andamans, which had got considerably damaged. It would take a longer time to settle. Thus, there was a need for long-term monitoring of the corals in middle and South Andamans. There was no significant loss of corals in the Gulf of Mannar. Salinity on the Tamil Nadu coast had increased and it would take about two rainy seasons for it to subside. (Andaman and Nicobar now 3 metres closer, TH.B, 10.05.05, S40)

The action plan for the post-tsunami development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, submitted to the Centre by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), has strategies for both ecological and livelihood security. The plan for a "New Andamans" details plans for redesigning the farming and fishing systems that are best suited for the island ecosystem. The MSSRF team visited North Andaman, Middle Andaman, South Andaman, Little Andaman, Car Nicobar, Nancowrie and Great Nicobar group of islands and assessed the nature and extent of damage.

As Prof. M.S. Swaminathan pointed out (The Hindu, January 17, 2005), medium and long-term rehabilitation demands three things: strengthening the ecological foundations of sustainable human security; rehabilitating livelihoods and fostering sustainable livelihood security; putting in place a network of rural knowledge centres.

Each region in the islands was found to require a specific set of solutions. For instance, the rise of the landmass in North Andamans (Diglipur) has led to a fall in the water table. The littoral and mangrove swamps have dried up. Fresh water for paddy and horticultural crops has become scanty. So, the administration should immediately set up 'community water banks' with rainwater harvesting and conservation. Women's self-help groups should be formed and trained to manage water banks. Paddy should be cultivated only where it is a choice, both from the ecological and economical points of view.

In contrast, South Andaman has been inundated by seawater, especially the agriculture fields. The coming monsoon could disrupt communications, leading to transient hunger spots; even starvation deaths. The MSSRF has suggested the immediate setting up of community food banks. This also provides a food-for-work system. There is also great potential to establish mangrove bio-shields, taking advantage of the excellent nursery available in Yerrata, and integrate them with sustainable aquaculture. Tiger prawns and mud crabs can be readily cultured and these have great demand in both national and international markets.

Little Andaman has suffered total disruption of communication and therefore it is a potential hunger hotspot. Immediate action is necessary to set up community food banks. Since the Revenue Department controls the severely damaged beach forest it should help the Forest Department in ecological restoration and bio-shield erection.

The major challenge caused by the tsunami in the Nancowrie group of islands is the extensive damage to mangroves and the coconut forests. The bio-degradable debris should be used to make compost. The coconut trunks and the wood of the fallen trees could be used for construction of houses and also for furniture making.

In a nutshell, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands should use the forest and mangrove resources in a sustainable manner for the livelihood security of the local community. Agriculture should not be on the conventional lines of the mainland.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands are fortunate in having several tribal communities whose collective traditional wisdom is formidable. Planning and development should be based on a bottom-up approach involving the local elected representatives, captains and members of the tribal councils. With over 85 % of forest cover, these islands are excellent 'green' factories that consume carbon and produce oxygen. (An opportunity for the devastated islands, P.C. Kesavan and K.Balasubramanian, TH.B, 27.05.05, S40)

An agreement between Port Blair, capital of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Phuket in Thailand for promotion of tourism will be signed in Phuket on June 30. It will include education and culture, urban development, solid waste management, commerce and investments. The pact will remain in force for five years. The inking of the agreement is expected to boost tourism on the islands devastated by the tsunami last year-end, according to an official press release. (Port Blair, Phuket to sign agreement, TOI.B, 30.06.05, S40)

Israeli back-packers have invaded remote islands in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, threatening its fragile ecological balance. At stake is a beach crowned Asia's best. For the last couple of years, low-cost Israeli tourists have swamped the pristine beaches of Havelock (voted the best beach in Asia by Time magazine in November 2004), Long and Neil islands between December and April, raising eco and socio concerns. "These tourists litter beaches and defecate along it. If remedial measures are not taken, the damage could be irreparable," warned Pacific Asia Travel association-India chapter (environment, eco-tourism & heritage committee) chairman Mandip Singh Soin. Marine biologists have already discovered a shift in the nesting pattern of turtles. Beach bonfires lit by shoe-string budget tourists have scared them away. There are also fears of forest cover denudation in the islands. It isn't just the ecology, the backpackers have also assaulted the sensitivity of native Nicobarese with beach nudity. "The children were bunking school to ogle at the beaches. Though nudity is banned, these tourists don't care," Soin pointed out. The tourism trade has urged the Union Tourism Ministry and the A&N administration to take steps to weed out the problem before Andamans turns into another Digha. (Israelis invade Andamans' remote islands, Subhro Niyogi, TOI.B, 27.07.05, S40)

Are the Andamans fast on the road to becoming the next best alternative to Phuket's sex industry? Some leading Indian environmentalists have slammed the tourism deal by India's tsunami-hit Andaman and Nicobar Islands with Thailand, saying such a move would destroy its fragile ecology and encourage the sex trade. In a move to breathe new life into the shattered economy in the islands, the authorities signed a five-year deal in June with the resort town of Phuket in Thailand, famous for its beaches but also for a burgeoning sex trade. The deal would allow tourists visiting Phuket to take a short flight to the Andamans. According to the environmentalists, who have now written to UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, seeking her immediate intervention, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration is using the tsunami as a garb to lure Phuket's tourists to the Andamans. ('Don't turn Andamans into Phuket', TOI.D, 08.08.05, S40)

From all across the Indian mainland, tourists are pouring into the Andamans. 'Hundreds of businesspeople and professionals, even middle class Indians, are rushing to the Andamans for a holiday with a difference,' says local tourism official Rana Mathew. "The curiosity generated by the tsunami is getting the better of the fear." Mr. Mathew said that before the tsunami Bengalis made up the bulk of domestic tourists coming to the islands but people from southern India have exceeded them so far this year. In winter, though the Bengalis, who make up the bulk of India's domestic tourists, are coming in droves. So are tourists from up north. Hotels and flights are fully booked for the next two months. In the early 1990s, the Andamans used to get around 10,000 to 12,000 tourists a year. By 2000 tourist traffic had grown 10-fold. But after the tsunami the monthly average fell to about 500. Now the Central Government is encouraging its employees to travel to the islands on holiday and offering them free air fares.

The islands need to improve their infrastructure like inter-island shipping and better hotels and connections to the mainland to exploit their tourism potential. Even foreign tour and travel companies have begun investing in resorts here. Sri Lanka's top hospitality chain, Atkins Spence has tied up with the Andamans' Barefoot group to develop a resort in Havelock Island and a few more elsewhere. (Tourism time in the Andamans, Subir Bhaumik, TH.B, 04.01.06, S40)

Apart from the destruction caused by the tsunami, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are witnessing another problem, a divide between the local tribal population and the mainland settlers. The tribals want the mainlanders to leave. The tribal heads have given a written petition to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. The issue also came up during the three-day trip of the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil. Mr. Patil, however, dismissed it as temporary fear of exploitation by the non-tribals. "Sometimes the local tribal people feel that they would have to share their natural resources and land with the mainlanders. They have also complained of indiscriminate felling of trees but they will have to get over it".

Ayesha Begum, chairperson of the Tribal Council of the Nancowrie group of islands, alleged that the non-tribals were "eating" into their resources and even exploiting the local population. She said they wanted the Defence personnel and the Government employees to stay and the businessmen and the retired people to leave. Ayesha Begum expressed unhappiness with the Central Government for its failure in helping the tribals to start afresh after the tsunami. "We are dependent on Government relief, which is not coming. If we were given tools to clear the debris and construction material like bamboo, we would have built houses in our own way," she said.

On the other hand, a large number of Sikh families, mainly retired servicemen who settled in the Nicobar Islands in 1969 under a Government scheme, have expressed their desire to go back to the mainland. The Government scheme envisaged settling 500 retired Defence personnel on the Island by giving them incentives such as free land for farming. However, the project was abandoned midway. Of the 100 Sikh families brought here, 70 made the island their home. (Andaman tribals want mainlanders to leave, Aarti Dhar, TH.B, 17.02.05, S40)

Andaman Islands have received the top ranking in the selection of 10 top beaches of the world. The Union Minister of Tourism and Culture, Ambika Soni, told the Rajya Sabha a German tour operator De Ruiter had selected the world's best 10 beaches. Top ranking was given to Andaman Islands followed by Lakshadweep, Maldives and Seychelles. His assessment was based on verifiable factors such as sand quality, depth of water, etc. TIME magazine had earlier declared beach No.7, Havelock Island in the Andamans as the "Best beach in Asia." (Top ranking for Andaman beach, TH.D, 24.02.06, S40)

In an attempt to turn Andaman & Nicobar Island into a major tourism hub, the government is considering a slew of measures including turning the domestic airport in the union territory (UT) into an international airport, opening 15 new islands to tourists and developing 50 new sites for high-end tourism. The Planning Commission, approved a sum of Rs 235 crore for the UT under the Rajiv Gandhi Rehabilitation Package in addition to the plan size of Rs 1 120 crore. According to sources, draft terms and conditions for leasing the 50 identified locations for eco-friendly promotion has been cleared by the Ministry of Tourism. (15 new islands in Andaman to be opened to tourists, Amiti Sen, FE.B, 18.03.06, S40)

■ T – FOREIGN COUNTRIES ■

T00 International Tourism Volumes and Patterns

World tourism revenue rose 10 % to a record \$622 billion in 2004 as North American tourist receipts increased for the first time since 2001, the World Tourism Organization said. The US had the most revenue from tourism as receipts rose 16 percent to \$75 billion. Spain was the second-largest tourism market with \$45.2 billion in revenue, and France was third at \$40.8 billion. Tourist arrivals rose 11 percent to 760 million last year, the fastest rate of growth in 20 years, as tourism picked up in the wake of the war in Iraq and the containment of severe acute respiratory syndrome. ('World tourism revenue rose to a record in 2004', FE.C, 21.07.05, T00)

Japanese and Chinese travellers are to set to challenge the dominance of the Germans over the next 15 years for the title of world's most prolific globe-trotters, according to a survey. Research company MINTEL said Japan and China will generate around four times as many outbound trips in 2020 as they did last year, making them number two and three respectively behind Germany. MINTEL's Richard Cope said both countries would be driven by growth in their business and leisure markets. (Asians to challenge German tourism record, says study, FE.B, 21.01.06, T00)

International tourist arrivals are expected to grow by between 4 % and 5 %, says the United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). In its quarterly 'World Tourism Barometer' report, released recently, the UNWTO says that Asia-Pacific and West Asia are forecast to exhibit strong growth of around 9 % and 8 % respectively, while more moderate growth in international tourist arrivals is expected in Europe, the Americas and Africa. The report also reveals that international tourist arrivals in 2005 grew by 5.5 %, continuing the upward trend witnessed in 2004. Last year, there were an estimated 808 million international tourist arrivals, up from 766 million in 2004. In 2005, the highest growth rate in international tourist arrivals was in Africa estimated to be 10 %. During the same period, Asia-Pacific registered an estimated growth rate of 7 %, the Americas 6 %, West Asia 7 % and Europe 4 %, the report adds. While leisure tourism is believed to have outperformed business tourism, the global MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) market has picked up last year, the report says. However, this market has seen changes with incentive meetings increasingly being combined with business meetings to justify costs, save on tax and maximise employee motivation. (Global tourist arrivals likely to grow 4-5 pc, Sankar Radhakrishnan, BL.B, 28.01.06, T00)

T10 South Asia

The emergency and fear of insurgency have cast a shadow over tourism. There are no buyers for souvenirs of display at Kathmandu's Thamel, Durbar Square, King's Way and New Road, considered to be shopping paradises. Shops selling artefacts, handicrafts, mountaineering gears and electronic goods look empty, so are hotels and restaurants. The steep decline in tourism becomes glaringly visible when you move outside Kathmandu. There, one can also see the effect of long-drawn battle between the Maoists and the Government. "Business is down almost 70 percent. We get a major share of our tourists from India. And we've only till May-end to catch up," says Krishna Katwal, manager of a hotel in Nagarkot. It's not that the Maoists are everywhere. In fact, there's no sign of them anywhere at major tourist destinations like Pokhara, Bhaktapur, Nagarkot, Jomosom etc. Though a bit uncomfortable under the looming presence of army men who zip past and stop by to take a close look, tourists feel relatively safe at many of the tourism hotspots. It's only the fear that is stopping them from flocking in. But again, the situation may be different in far-flung areas of the country that are beyond the reach of the Kathmandu's ruling class. (Kathmandu breathes easy under King; But fear factor leaves Nepal's tourism industry gasping for breath, Kiran Prakash, IE.B, 13.04.05, T10)

Targeting religious tourists of South India, Nepal is holding road shows to woo them with special packages to the Pasupathinath temple, besides offering traditional fare such as trekking and leisure holidays. After a presentation and interaction with tour operators of the state the Nepal tourism Board (NTB) Manager, Mr. Ujjwala Dali, said the Himalayan Kingdom witnessed a boom in inflow of Indian tourists, prompting it to launch

a focused marketing strategy for South India. The NTB has chalked out special package for a Pashupatinath temple for the forthcoming Shivratri festival on February 26. Other areas of interest included leisure holidays, adventure, trekking and honeymoon destinations, board officials said. (Nepal woos tourists from South India., BL.C, 27.01.06, T10)

Despite being haunted by extremism and its vulnerability to repeated natural calamities that affected its tourist destinations, Sri Lanka is sparing no efforts to keep its rich tourism potential alive. Several new initiatives are being contemplated to attract more tourists from India, particularly, Karnataka. Sri Lankan tourism minister Anura Bandaranaike, who was here in connection with opening of an office of his country's board of investments (BOI), said that his government was trying to attract both software professionals and tourists from India as they, unlike European tourists whose interest is mainly cultural and educational, knew his country's potential for investment in both the areas. Sri Lanka's BOI also would embark on 'India specific tourism promotion campaign' to encourage Indians to visit the island. The present arrangement of 'visa on arrival' would continue since the system was expected to bring more visitors to his country, Bandaranaike said.

The highest number of tourists (5,56,202) to Sri Lanka was in 2004 fetching a record revenue of \$ 416 million. This year's revenue is expected to reach \$ 600 million. The tourist flow was unabated despite tsunami devastation; he said and expected their number to increase by 1.30 lakh. It was in anticipation of this that Sri Lankan government was taking a number of initiatives to make the tourists' stay safe and comfortable, he said. Bandaranaike was happy to disclose that the tourism sector had generated about 1.12 lakh jobs, directly or indirectly, in his country. The Sri Lankan government was also considering bringing in a new law soon providing for setting up of bureaus, even by private enterprises, to professionalise tourism. The BOI also would be upgraded to 'tourism development authority' and armed with more powers, backed by due legislations, to develop tourism, Bandaranaike said. Sri Lanka would also embark on 'India specific tourism promotion campaign' to encourage Indians to visit the Island. The present arrangement of 'visa on arrival' would continue since the system was expected to bring more visitors (Lanka wants to attract tourists from State, VT.B, 26.05.05, T10)

Sri Lankan Airlines has tied up with the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board for a joint promotion of the tourism destinations of their respective countries in Kerala. Sri Lanka is currently promoting travel to the Far East from South India. The airline has announced attractive fares for travel to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Beijing, Bangkok and Hong Kong. The fares are an attractive 30% lower than normal fares. Around 22 top agents and tour operators from Tiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode would be familiarised with the top destinations of the two countries in a 5-night trip covering Colombo, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur. (SriLankan ties up with Malaysian tourism, ET.B, 15.02.06, T10)

Travelling from India to Southeast Asia by road or rail could soon become a reality, with the conclusion of a feasibility report on a rail link between India and Myanmar, while another study examines prospects for an India-Vietnam link. The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and Asean leaders felt the need to enhance connectivity between the two regions and said that the first stage of the Delhi-Hanoi feasibility study was under way. Dr Singh also discussed the trilateral road project between India-Myanmar-Thailand. A successful car rally was held from Guwahati to Vientiane in Laos a few years ago, a proof of the geographical proximity between India and South East Asia. (Push for rail, road links plan with Myanmar, BL.B, 14.12.05, T10)

T20 South East Asia

Indian couples can now look forward to solemnising their marriages in Malaysia. As part of an effort to woo Indians planning to get married, Tourism Malaysia has sent a group of eight wedding planners from India to Malaysia to show them first hand what the country has to offer for those seeking to tie the knot. Besides, there will also be a blend of Indianess as Malaysia has 2.2 million Indians and all materials related to an Indian marriage are easily available there. However, as in the case of other exotic destinations, the target audience is likely to be affluent Indians looking for a value-for-money proposition. The promoters of the new concept are hoping that with each wedding party having about 100-150 people, it would be a win-win situation for Malaysia and the bride and groom. (Malaysia courts Indian couples, BL.B, 04.09.05, T20)

With increased tourist arrivals in Malaysia from India, particularly from Chennai, Bangalore, Kochi and Hyderabad, Malaysia is working out modalities to issue electronic visa (e-visa).

Authorised travel agents in Bangalore and other cities will be able to provide the e-visa. At present, visa applications are routed to the Chennai Consulate. E-visa is being planned to increase the number of tourist arrivals from India, for which Tourism Malaysia has embarked on a Rs. 12-crore campaign. India has moved to the 9th position among the countries that recorded maximum tourist arrivals. In 2005, the number of Indian arrivals in Malaysia exceeded 2.10 lakhs and the country is targeting 3.5 lakh visitors next year, when Malaysia celebrates its golden jubilee. (Malaysia plans e-visa for Indian tourists, TH.B, 03.03.06, T20)

Singapore scrapped a four decade ban on casinos to boost tourism, clearing the way for companies including Las Vegas Sands Corp and MGM mirage to compete for the right to build an entertainment complex in the city. The government may allow two casinos, in downtown Singapore and on the island of Sentosa. It will seek detailed plans from developers, having received 19 proposals already. Lee said two casino resorts may create as many as 35,000 jobs. They may also lure tourists to a city to expand this year at half the 8.4% pace of 2004. The Chinese city of Macau, where 17 casinos operate, had three times the economic growth and twice as many visitors as Singapore in 2004.

The project faces opposition in a nation where films are censored and drug dealers are executed. Religious and social groups such as Focus on the Family say casinos may lead to more loan sharking and prostitution, and lure people into dept. To alleviate concern, the government proposed a S\$100 daily levy on citizens and permanent residents entering the casino. (Singapore to allow casinos to boost tourism, add jobs, FE.B, 19.04.05, T20)

With Indians emerging as the top spenders among tourists visiting Singapore, the southeast Asian country is now wooing the nouveau riche from smaller towns and cities. Indians on an average stay for six days and their spending is nearly \$300. Japanese spend higher than them, but their average stay is just for three days. Singapore received a record 471,000 Indian visitors in 2004, making it sixth largest visitor generating market. This represents a 25% growth over the previous record of 375,000 Indians in 2002. (Singapore tourism eyes towns, metros in India, FE.B, 07.05.05, T20)

The Singapore Government is now focusing on the hospital tourism and education sectors. Service industries are also being encouraged to set up base. International Universities including Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford have collaborated with local ones to offer degrees in the country. Currently there are around 4,000 students in Singapore. IIT Mumbai has also tied up with NTU, Singapore to offer courses. The country is also inviting entrepreneurs. According to the World Bank Report, Singapore is the second easiest place to set up business. (Singapore shifts focus to hospital tourism, education, BL.B, 17.12.05, T20)

A local government campaign to attract more bathers to a South Korean beach resort by offering incentives to swimmers wearing bikinis has upset women's rights activists. Ahead of the peak summer bathing season, Buan County administration south-west of Seoul renamed its Byeonsan Beach Bikini Beach and promised wearers of skimpy swimsuits a 10 % discount on bills for hotels, meals and beach equipment rentals. The county put up wall posters with pictures of bikini-clad beauties and the inscription: "Show off your beauty and get a 10 % discount." Women's groups denounced the campaign as exploitation. "This is an outrageous attempt to stimulate the regional economy by exploiting the female sex," said a statement from the association of women activists of North Jeolla Province.

A campaign to attract more visitors should focus on publicising the county's "natural beauty instead of the naked female body," it said. But officials at the Buan county office were unrepentant and said by telephone that they had no plan to stop the campaign. "I don't understand why they are so angry. This is just part of a publicity campaign aimed at promoting the name of the Bikini Beach. We have no intention to exploit or commercialise the female sex," said an official. (Bikini Beach angers women's group, BL.B, 09.07.05, T20)

T30 East Asia

China's rapid economic growth has fostered a tourist boom among the mainland Chinese, with South-east Asia the favourite destination, at least for now. The surge in package tour groups from China, an important source of income for the region, is also giving rise to an unflattering stereotype: the loud, rude and culturally naive Chinese tourist.

The tide of travellers from China mirrors the emergence of virtually every group of overseas tourists since the Romans, from Britons behaving badly in the Victorian era and ugly Americans in post-war Europe to the snapshot-happy Japanese of the 1980's.

So it is not much of a surprise that tourists from mainland China, often going abroad for the first time, are leaving similar complaints in their wake. But China is also manufacturing its own twist on the age-old tale, as became apparent in July when a group of more than 300 from China took umbrage at illustrations of a pig's face on their check-in vouchers at a casino resort in predominantly Muslim Malaysia.

So far, only an estimated 2 % of China's population ventures abroad each year, according to a recent report on China tourism by CLSA Emerging Markets in Hong Kong. But the World Tourism Organization predicts that China will become the world's fourth-largest source of overseas tourists by 2020. Groups from China began travelling to Europe last year. And if the United States agrees to grant visas to China's tourists, analysts say it will undoubtedly be a top destination.

Clean and safe, Singapore, with its large Mandarin-speaking population, attracts more Chinese tourists than any of its Southeast Asian neighbours. The typical visit to Singapore is just three days. The average income is still below \$2,000 a year, and most tourists from China sign up for \$250 package tours that whisk them through as many as five countries in a week.

Many of these tours are what the industry calls zero-dollar tours, providing no profit margin. Instead, the agents make their money by diverting their groups to jewellers or restaurants that give them a commission on sales.

While some analysts say China's tourists have dubious benefits to regional tourism, others argue that they have a broader economic impact. Unlike Westerners or Japanese who splurge on expensive resorts and spend their entire vacation sunbathing, they say, the Chinese devote a greater proportion of their holiday time to sight-seeing and shopping.

China's tourists stand apart from other tourists in other ways, say members of Singapore's hospitality industry. "They're more demanding," said Johnson Lim, who handles groups from China for a local travel agency. Boon Sang Lip, a souvenir stand operator, put it more bluntly: "They like to talk in a loud and not very polite way." When they check into hotels, for instance, many tourists from China demand the top floors. Some feel entitled to take souvenirs like hotel pillows. But much of the behaviour stems from inexperience. Chinese citizens may travel only to countries on a government-approved list. Individual travels, while possible, requires onerous paperwork, so most Chinese travel in large groups. For all the challenges, China's tourist migrations represent a lucrative source of income that countries like Singapore are vying to attract. Casinos are one case in point. With casinos illegal in China, virtually every trip abroad includes such a visit. (Welcoming Chinese, But Not Their Style, Wayne Arnold, AA.D, 29.10.05, T30)

T40 Middle East/West /Central Asia

Russia says liberalising its visa regime will be a major point on its agenda with India in the coming year. It hopes to settle all outstanding issues concerning "immigration" and "re-admission" and conclude an agreement. The move follows persistent demands by Indian businessmen and industry alike for easing the visa regulations in order to give a much-needed fillip to the Indo-Russian bilateral trade and also boost Indian investments in Russia. Concerns had also been expressed after India came to be associated with countries of potential immigrants who made their way into Europe via Russia. (Russia wants to ease visa rules, Ramesh Ramachandran, AA.B, 26.12.05, T40)

T50 Africa

Kenya tourism has decided to step up its campaign in India with a focus on the FIT (free individual travel) market. Over 32,000 Indians last year visited the African republic, known world over for its wildlife safaris. The number of Indian visitors has been rising since 2001 when only a modest 9,000 people visited Kenya. The tourism board officials said Indian arrivals were up 31% last year. This year the target was a 35%

increase in traffic over the '05 base. Indian visitor spends was also on the rise spending \$200/300 a day, the duration of stay in Kenya had gone up from 4/5 days to 9/10 days now.

Tourism receipts for Kenya were in the region of \$550/560 million last calendar. International arrivals were about 1.6 million, split equally between cross-border tourists and visitors from outside the continent. The largest contingent of tourists was from Europe and the US, while India was the biggest contributor from Asia, officials. (Kenya Tourism to Focus On FIT Market, ET.B, 18.02.06, T50)

T60 Europe

An Indian traveller to Europe now need never worry how to explore the continent. Rail Europe, a joint venture of the French and Swiss national railways, will target travellers through its newly-opened liaison office in Bangalore. Rail Europe, based in Paris, is in charge of promotion and sale of European rail tickets in Asia, Austria, Africa and South America. It has also opened a liaison office in Mumbai. Rail Europe does not sell tickets directly to the end-consumer, but promotes and sells through a network of 70 general sales agents throughout the world. Rail Europe offers Eurail passes that enables one to visit 17 countries including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. It also offers point-to-point tickets and train journey reservations on the Channel tunnel train Eurostar and the high-speed train from Paris to Brussels, Amsterdam and Cologne. The Eurail passes entitle one to free or discount fare travel on ferries and buses. The prices range from \$588 to \$1,654. (Rail Europe opens office in Bangalore, IE.C, 26.08.05, T60)

■ U – INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY ■

U30 GATT/World Trade Organisation

To wrest beneficial reciprocity from the developed world, New Delhi set to rob itself of the freedom to reverse FDI policies once they are liberalised autonomously. In its revised offer on services to be made shortly under WTO's Doha round, India is likely to effect substantial qualitative improvements in 'Modes' and the number of services. (Fresh services offer may bind India to sectoral FDI caps, K G Narendranath, FE.B, 25.05.05, U30)

The European Union offered 'improved' access for foreign companies to its service industries such as banking, energy and tourism, a key step in negotiations for a global free trade pact. The EU's revised offer comes amid intense debate over how far too open up the service sector across 25-nation bloc itself, with western European countries anxious about the prospects of low-cost competition from new members to the east. Sent by the European Commission to the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO), the offer exempts from international competition sensitive sectors that provide public services. (EU widens access to services for WTO deal, FE.B, 03.06.05, U30)

India has said that the 'environment project approach' (EPA) it suggested for identifying environmental goods for preferential tariff treatment cannot be complementary to the 'list approach' being promoted by developed countries like the US and the EU. Stating that it was a stand alone approach, India invited World Trade Organisation (WTO) members to deliberate on the structural and substantive dimensions of the EPA. Currently, discussions are on at the WTO committee on trade and environment (CTE) on ways to identify environmental goods that should be given preferential tariff treatment by members. The Doha declaration (which is the basis for the on-going round) had mandated the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in environmental goods and services.

As per the list approach, members are supposed to agree on a list of environmental products which would be given preferential tariff treatment. India, however, feels that the approach is complicated as it is very difficult to arrive at a consensus on what products should qualify as environment products. Instead, India is advocating the EPA, under which preferential tariff treatment would be only given to the products used in identified environmental projects.

Many developing countries have expressed their inability to contribute effectively to the debate and have a perception that the 'list approach' only succeeds in expanding market access for developed country products without concomitant benefits to developing countries.

According to India's plans, all countries should put in place a Designated National Authority (DNA) to identify environmental projects. The WTO CTE would formulate the criteria to be applied by the DNA in determining if an environmental project qualifies for tariff concessions on environmental goods and services. The DNA's role would be that of examining applications in light of those criteria. (India pushes for eco project approach for tariff benefits, Amiti Sen, FE.B, 07.07.05, U30)

India has stepped up its efforts to strengthen its alliance with G-33 countries and has also become an aggressive partner in the ABI group (Argentina, Brazil and India) to take on the US, EU and other nations at the proposed WTO ministerial meeting. As a part of its strategy, India, amid renewed bonhomie with the US and EU, has planned to aggressively seek a commitment from these countries on cross border services, specifically trade reform that would ensure outsourcing to India is not prohibited. India has put forward a services offer which makes fresh commitments on Mode 3 (allowing establishment of commercial presence) and Mode 1 (covering crossborder supply of services). It has also called upon the US and other nations to lower custom duties. India has already communicated to WTO members its stand on further improvement on Mode 4 (services and trade). Mode 4 addressed the movement of natural persons and relates to visa regulations. (India to seek commitments on outsourcing at WTO meet, Sanjay Jog, FE.B, 16.09.05, U30)

Undoubtedly the outcome of the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that concluded in Hong Kong on December 25 was modest. The biggest achievement is that the Ministerial did not flop. A second collapse after Cancun would have been really disastrous for the multilateral trading system. While a failed Ministerial puts the agenda in a reverse gear, a successful one at least sends a positive signal. The second important result is, for the second time in a row, countries of the South not only remained united, but reinforced their unity, telling the North that enough is enough.

Cancun to Hong Kong: After the Cancun fiasco, it took three-four months for the negotiators to come to the negotiating table and resume the dialogue. This resulted in the "July Package", which once again raised the expectations of the developing countries. Alas, the euphoria created by the July Framework Agreement proved short-lived. Back home, WTO members succumbed to the real politic and started singing in different tunes. The result: The Doha Round once again plunged into serious crisis. This is evident from the fact that in the run up to the Hong Kong Ministerial, the draft declaration was supposed to be released after the General Council (GC) meeting of July 05, in what was called "July Approximations". But the GC meeting failed to evolve a consensus.

What happened at Hong Kong? The Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting began on a pessimistic note. It turned into a four-corner contest, with the G-20 and the G-33 on one side, and the EU, the US and the least developed countries (LDCs) on the other. As usual, developed countries started shedding crocodile tears for LDCs. A plethora of hollow promises in the form "aid for trade", duty- and quota-free market access and many more were served to the LDCs. The main objective was to shift the focus from the core agenda of trade liberalisation. The G-20 and the G-33, on their part, tried to be practical. They realised that it would be foolish to expect any ambitious result from Hong Kong, given the prevailing divergence of opinions on agriculture. They demanded that on export subsidies, as per the "July Framework" Agreement, the WTO members had to agree only on the end date of their elimination, which would have been the easiest thing to implement.

Unfortunately, instead of discussing this, the two major trading giants, the EU and the US, got entangled in a dog and cat fight over giving food aid to poor countries. Finally, on December 16, the first-ever joint G-20 and G-90 Ministerial-level meeting took place. The Commerce Minister, Mr Kamal Nath, and his Brazilian counterpart, Mr Celso Amorin, were both instrumental in building this grand alliance of 110 countries covering four-fifth of the humanity. This thwarted and called the bluff of the rich countries to lure the LDCs and divide the unity of the South.

End result of Hong Kong: The outcome of Hong Kong was modest, which was not unexpected. The main demand of the G-20 to eliminate export subsidies by 2010 was not accepted by the EU; instead, a compromise date of 2013 was agreed with some frontloading. This also culminates with the EU Common Agricultural Policy reform. What is most unfortunate is that the language on export subsidies has been made more complex. The G-20 can no more say that this will be easy to implement. On providing duty and quota-free market access to LDCs, the demand of including all products has not been accepted unequivocally. However, the text on non-agricultural market access (NAMA) gives a sense of comfort to some extent as tariff peaks and escalation would be reduced or appropriately eliminated by using the Swiss Formula with multiple coefficients. Preference erosion, which is one of the major fears of LDCs, has been recognised in the text.

Lessons from Hong Kong: Developing countries need to develop an alternative to Northern markets. This is only possible through greater South-South cooperation on trade and economic issues. This should also cover the larger issues of technical assistance and capacity-building. Greater South-South trade will further strengthen different South alliances in the WTO which, at present, are more political in nature. Over the last decade (1990-2001), developing economies have grown much faster than developed ones and transition countries and are expected to continue to do so in the coming years. (Another show of South solidarity, Pradeep S. Mehta & Pranav Kumar, BL.B, 29.12.05, U30)

U31 GATS

As trade talks gather force towards the Sixth Ministerial Meet at Hong Kong, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) continues to stump negotiators. With only 50 countries (counting the 25 EU members as one) making 'offers' so far, services, along with agriculture, is expected to be a key area of contention at the December summit.

GATS continues to be 'working progress': Among the 12 services sectors under the GATS, tourism has seen the most action. At last count, 125 of its 148 members had made commitments to open their tourism sectors. The implication of this is that most WTO members consider free trade rules in tourism as good policy. India already has a highly liberalised tourism policy and in a submission to the WTO in January 2004, it signalled its intention to further open up.

Tourism is a very complex sector, closely linked to a broad range of economic, social and cultural policies and has spill-over impacts into many other sectors of an economy. Unfortunately, policymakers seem oblivious to these concerns, reflected by the fact that tourism policy in the country is characterised by lack of proper laws and violations of those in place.

Recent analysis by EQUATIONS, a policy research NGO-based in Bangalore, shows it is precisely this environment of underdeveloped policy and poor implementation, combined with the pressure to make GATS commitments that creates a real threat to the advancement of a sustainable tourism policy. Given the diversity that exists in terms of tourist destinations in India and corresponding policy requirements, it is optimal that the representative governments of the area effectively enforce planning, regulation and monitoring of tourism projects. 'It is well recognised that GATS will intrude into these democratic spaces, as commitments made by the commerce ministry will apply to all regional and local government authorities,' says K T Suresh of Equations. Take the case of the recently passed Kerala Tourism (Conservation and Preservation of Areas) Act, 2005. The Act allows the Kerala government to declare any area in the state as a tourism zone and empowers a committee to regulate activities inside such zones. Equations says such legislation, that recognises the need for sustainable planning and decentralised policy, will run afoul of GATS. In January 2004, India signalled its intention to have no quantitative limitations on foreign enterprises in the hotels and tour operator category. Says Equations, this means that the national and, more importantly, regional and local governments will not be able to restrict the activities of foreign tourism providers in ecologically-fragile tourism areas. 'Added to a freeze on sustainable policy this hits at the heart of democratic decision making,' says Mr Suresh. (Tourism: sunset for sustainable policy? Local governments need to be kept in the loop before making commitments, Benny Kuruvilla, FE.C, 15.06.05, U31)

The Indian delegation at the World Trade Organisation has submitted a Revised Offer in August 2005 in the ongoing negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the WTO. The revised offer is conditional on other WTO members.

The background of the revised offer is as follows. As part of the ongoing negotiations, offers were initially made in the Doha Round in sectors/ sub-sectors covered in the commitments made in the Uruguay Round. The seven sectors covered were:

- ◆ Business services
- ◆ Communication services
- ◆ Construction and related engineering services
- ◆ Financial services
- ◆ Health related and social services
- ◆ Tourism and travel related services
- ◆ Transport services

Expanded offer: The revised offer includes four other sectors in which either initial offers were not made in the Doha Round or commitments were not taken in the Uruguay Round. These are distribution services, education services, environmental services, and recreational, cultural and sporting services. In all, the revised offer covers 11 sectors.

Supply modes: India is more interested in Modes 1 and 4. The Mode 4 interest arises from the presence of a large skilled and competitive workforce. On the other hand, core competence in IT enabled services will enable India to take advantage of Mode 1 or cross-border supply of services. Till now, India had been very conservative in its overall approach. In fact, in areas such as financial services, commitments lagged behind even autonomous liberalisation. It is heartening to note that, given the success that India has achieved in respect of services export and the burgeoning foreign exchange reserves, there is now more confidence while conducting international trade negotiations.

List of sectors: As mentioned earlier, India has offered extensive commitments in a number of new sectors/ sub-sectors. Improvements have also been made in the existing commitments in a number of sectors.

India had already made a substantial Mode 4 initial offer by including all categories of natural persons such as intra-corporate transferees, business visitors, contractual service suppliers and independent professionals.

Sectors/ sub-sectors offered include the following:

1. Business services: Professional services; accounting & book-keeping services (excluding auditing services); architectural services; integrated engineering services; and urban planning and landscape architectural services.

Medical and dental services: Veterinary services; and services provided by midwives, nurses, physiotherapists and para-medical services.

R&D services: R&D in agricultural sciences; and R&D in social sciences and humanities.

Real estate services: On a fee or contract basis.

Rental / leasing services (without operators)

Other business services: Management consulting services; services incidental to fishing; services incidental to energy distribution (excluding energy trading and load dispatch functions); placement and supply of personnel; maintenance and repair of equipment (not including maritime vessels, aircraft or other transport equipment); building cleaning services; packaging services; convention services; and specialty design services.

2. Distribution services (excluding live animals)

— Commission agents' services covering sales on a fee or contract basis of: agricultural raw materials; food products excluding beverages and tobacco; machinery, industrial equipment and vehicles; furniture, household goods, hardware and ironmongery.

— Wholesale trade services: agricultural raw materials; food products excluding beverages and tobacco; textiles, clothing, and footwear; household appliances, articles and equipment; miscellaneous consumer goods; machinery, equipment and supplies

3. Education services: Higher education services

4. Environmental services: Refuse disposal services; and sanitation and similar services

5. Insurance and insurance related services: Life insurance; and services auxiliary to insurance such as consultancy, actuarial, risk assessment.

6. Banking and other financial services (excluding insurance): Asset management such as cash or portfolio management, all forms of collective investment management, pension fund management, custodial, depository and other trust services.

7. Tourism and travel related services: Tourist guides services.

8. Recreational, cultural and sporting services (other than audio-visual services): Entertainment services (including theatre, live bands and circus services); and sporting and other recreational services (excluding lottery, gambling and betting services)

9. Transport services: Maritime transport services.

— Maritime auxiliary services: maritime cargo handling services; storage and warehousing services in ports; customs clearance services; container station and depot services; maritime agency services; maritime freight forwarding services; international rental/ charter of vessels with crew or on bareboat basis (excluding cabotage and offshore transport); maintenance and repairs of seagoing vessels; ship broking service

— Air transport services: maintenance and repair of aircraft.

(India expands access offer under GATS, Abhijit Roy, TH.B, 03.10.05, U31)

U41 World Bank

On his first visit to India after taking charge, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, was confronted with vociferous protests against “the Bank’s policies and conditionalities of water privatisation through the back door.” The message of the agitators to the World Bank chief was: “Hands Off Water.” In his meeting here with three representatives of the protesting environmentalists, water and women’s groups under the banner of Citizen’s Front for Water Democracy, Mr. Wolfowitz is understood to have said that he was not aware of the issue. “Then stop giving loans for water privatisation. We will decide what to do; the Bank does not have to impose its financial muscle to hand over our water supply and water services to global corporations,” the three representatives — Vandana Shiva of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology; S.A. Naqvi of the Water Workers’ Alliance; and Amarjeet Kaur of the National Federation of Indian Women — told Mr. Wolfowitz.

Memorandum submitted: Dr. Shiva said that the representatives impressed upon the Bank chief that “water was sacred in India and we will not allow its commodification.” The Bank believes in providing “all water for some (through privatisation and high tariffs) and no water for most, whereas we believe in some for all.” The people’s representatives submitted a memorandum to Mr. Wolfowitz. The memorandum pointed out that over the years the Bank gave loans to India to build large dams and drill deep tube wells making the rivers and aquifers dry.

The memorandum said: “Firstly, the bank is using its loans as conditionality for privatisation. Secondly, it is reducing the universal access system of public utilities to a privileged access to industry and 24x7 supplies for rich urban areas. Thirdly, it is diverting limited and scarce water from rural areas to urban areas, thus undermining the Millennium Development Goal to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. Fourthly, the World Bank is forcing governments and public utilities to increase water tariffs and to commodify water, undermining people’s fundamental right to water as part of the right to life.

Fifthly, since its projects are based on non-sustainable water use, World Bank projects are failing as is clear in the case of Sonia Vihar plant in Delhi and Veeranam project in Tamil Nadu. (Hands off water, protesters tell World Bank president; Demonstrations against bank’s Policies, conditionality; Wolfowitz says he is not aware of issue, TH.B, 31.08.05, U41)

U43 Asian Development Bank

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is likely to fund a development project in north Karnataka costing around \$400 million. The Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (KUIDFC) Managing Director, Mr K.P. Krishnan, said that an ADB team will soon visit the State to discuss the issue with officials from the State Government. Addressing a workshop on “Sharing best practises on urban sector projects in India,” said the eight-year project would need the Centre’s approval before implementation. Mr Krishnan said about 25 towns will benefit from the project. The ADB has recently funded projects like the \$145-million project in 10 towns in coastal Karnataka and a \$ 107-million project in Mysore, Mandya, Maddur, Channapatna; Ramnagarām and Tumkur. Mr Krishnan said the ADB is trying to streamline its project processing norms to reduce the lead time from conception to loan approvals. (ADB may fund development project in north Karnataka, BL.B, 14.05.05, U43)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is to spend nearly \$1 billion over the next three years on projects aimed at developing closer regional cooperation. The \$952-million is part of the bank's Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme, which was approved earlier this month. CAREC will focus on transport, energy and trade in the 2006-2008 programme, which includes 16 major projects totalling \$943 million and 13 technical assistance projects totalling \$9 million. The programme is an alliance comprising eight countries — Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and six multilateral institutions: ADB, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Monetary Fund, Islamic Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme and World Bank. (ADB to push \$ 1 bn programme for regional cooperation, FE.B, 25.11.05, U43)

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social groups across Asia and India are all set to come together to protest against the Asian Development Bank (ADB) scheduled to hold its 39th Annual Governors' Meeting (AGM) in Hyderabad from May 3-6. The Governors are the highest level of decision makers in the ADB and the current Chair of the AGM is Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram.

Over 60 projects: The ADB is the third largest source of development finance in the Asia-Pacific region, next to the World Bank and the Japanese Government. In 2004, the ADB's total lending was \$ 5.3 billion which was used to promote 64 projects in the public policy sectors. Private sector assistance was to the tune of \$ 807.2 million. The ADB's largest borrowers in 2004 were China and India, each receiving \$ 1.3 billion, about 24 % of the total lending.

Net impact: Describing the Hyderabad AGM as an opportunity to work with the groups in Andhra Pradesh, the People's Forum Against ADB has called movements, communities, organisations and activists in India and across Asia to rise up against neo-liberalism. Whether through World Bank or ADB projects, the net impacts on communities and societies are the same, especially on the rural and urban poor, workers, agrarian communities, Dalits, tribals, women, peasants, fish workers, hawkers and slum dwellers, the Forum said. The ADB is a secretive, non-transparent and unaccountable institution, the Forum has pointed out. The ADB does not facilitate public participation in development planning and access to information. Its projects continue to displace hundreds of thousands of people across the region with little or no compensation, it said. (Call for protests against ADB, Aarti Dhar, TH.B, 26.03.06, U43)

The Asian Development Bank plans to launch several types of a theoretical Asian currency unit (ACU) comprising a basket of Asian currencies, and will announce details by the end of June. Masahiro Kawai, head of the ADB's office of regional economic integration, declined to say what types of units the Manila-based institution plans to initially launch along with an already planned ACU, using the ASEAN+ currencies which it hopes will eventually lead to ACU-denominated bond issuance. But he said the ADB could consider compiling other units that include the Hong Kong and Taiwan dollars, the Indian rupee, and currencies of other members. ASEAN+ 3 comprise ASEAN's 10 members plus China, Japan and South Korea. ASEAN groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. (ADB plans to launch 'theoretical' common currency for ASEAN plus 3, BL.B, 28.03.06, U43)

■ X – CULTURE AND SOCIETY ■

X11 Social and Political Systems

Binakadatti became the first gram panchayat in the Karnataka, where the newly elected members of the gram panchayat commenced their work with a lot of administrative and financial powers that Panchayat Raj Institutions in the country never enjoyed before. Binkadakatti Gram Panchayat, which covers the nearby Hirehandigol village too, arranged its first gram sabha to discuss the formulation of the five-year plan in general and its first annual plan for 2005-2006.

Accountability: Under the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, gram sabhas have been conceived as bodies to which the gram panchayats are accountable and to whom the panchayats should present accounts, and consult them on the formulation of plans. The Act also has a provision for ward sabhas to ensure greater participation of the people in the running of the lowest of the three-tier Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Decisions: The gram sabha is at liberty to return governments schemes that are of no relevance or utility to them and prepare their own plan for the all-round welfare of the people of that particular area. They (members) should ensure that no person slept hungry and no child is out of school.

Vision: Mr. Baligar (Principal Secretary, Dept of Rural Development & Panchayat Raj) unveiled a vision under which the village panchayat could go in for planning, meet the needs of infrastructure, secure economic emancipation by giving work to every pair of hands, and providing a purposeful role for the Stree Shakti groups. The panchayat could consider identifying the agricultural labourers and arrange to get them five guntas of land so that they could go in for cultivation of vegetables and fruits which should make them stand on their feet. (A historic day in panchayat raj history, Madan Mohan, T.H.B, 05.04.05, X11)

State governments and Union territories have been asked to complete the mapping for different tiers of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the next three months. The mapping was to be completed by the end of the last financial year. The 11th five-year Plan would be based on the plans prepared by the District Planning Committees, which would consolidate the plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities. The 12th Finance Commission has recommended a provision of Rs 20,000 crore for panchayats for five years, according to an official release. The meeting, chaired by Wajahat Habibullah, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, was held to review the progress of the implementation of the 150 recommendations of the seven round table conferences of state Panchayati Raj ministers held last year. The process was to be undertaken on the basis of identification of activities relating to the devolved functions of PRIs through the principle of subsidiarity. (Early mapping of panchayats sought, F.E.B, 13.04.05, X11)

The Union Minister of Law and Justice, K. R. Bhardwaj, said that the Government was drafting a separate law on panchayat courts (gram nyayalayas) which would be integrated into the existing Panchayati Raj system but not at the cost of diluting the quality of justice. Stating that he had already started interactions with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, and the National Advisory Council (NAC), Mr. Bhardwaj said he would consult non-governmental organisations that had worked in this field before drafting the law.

Pointing out that the existing panchayat system had become politicised in many states, Mr. Bhardwaj said that people in rural areas should not feel that their rights would be snatched away by the proposed panchayat courts. Mr. Bhardwaj said that the plan for panchayat courts would involve at least 2000 courts and more than 4000 judges. He said that he would like to involve more women judges and that the Government would introduce the element of legal aid by paying for legal aid lawyers to assist the courts. (Panchayat courts law being drafted, Rural people will be protected: Bhardwaj, Siddharth Narrain, T.H.B, 21.08.05, X11)

The Centre asked state governments not to divert funds meant for Panchayats, saying such "interventions" disrupt the effective functioning of the local bodies. "I am of the strong view that the funds sanctioned by the government should directly go to the panchayats and there shall be no interruption and intervention by

anybody,” Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmed said. In such a scenario “panchayats find it difficult to fulfil their roles due to paucity of funds.” (Centre asks states not to divert funds of local bodies, FE.B, 25.01.06, X11)

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Panchayati Raj Mani Shankar Aiyar expressed shock at the state of the Panchayati Raj system in Lakshadweep. He said that there was no Panchayati Raj worth its name in Lakshadweep. He was completing a one-day visit to the Union Territory during which he attended a combined meeting of village and district panchayats at Andrott. Mr. Aiyar said that it was a tragedy that the governance was virtually concentrated in the hands of bureaucrats rendering the panchayats mere appendages to a wholly Government-run administrative system of planning and representation. He said unless the Centre set an example of outstanding Panchayati system in Union Territories, as it was responsible for Union Territories, it would become an embarrassment for the Government to seek better Panchayati Raj system in States. Mr. Aiyar said that he, along with Mr. Reghupathy, had worked out a draft action plan for reviving the Panchayati Raj system in the archipelago, which was agreed on between the Central officials and a spectrum of elected village and district panchayat members. The action plan would be finalised in Delhi. (Panchayati Raj only in name in Lakshadweep: Minister, TH.B, 25.01.06, X11)

X12 Tribes and Development

The Centre has decided to amend the Forest Conservation Act 1980 that will enable Schedule Tribes to get ownership rights on the land where they were living. The amended legislation will be tabled in the Monsoon Session of Parliament. Tribals have no right on the land where they live. The total population of tribals in the country is 8.5 crore. Now the government has decided to amend the Forest Conservation Act 1980. Provisions of the FCA should be suitably amended to allow development activities to be taken up inside the forests. Most of the states are demanding amendments to the act to facilitate the regularisation of settlements inside forests. (Centre may amend act to help tribals get land, Pramod Kumar, AA.B, 24.07.05, X12)

X14 Human Rights of Tribes

The Punarvasan Sangharsh Samiti (PSS), Nandurbar, and various other tribal rights organisations in Maharashtra have launched a month-long campaign for the immediate tabling of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005 in Parliament even as conservationists and the Forest Department are opposing its provisions.

Encouraged by the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill in Parliament, there has been mobilisation in the adivasi areas of Maharashtra for the bill to be passed. Since August 16, from Nandurbar in Maharashtra, the PSS has launched a series of mass meetings in various tribal pockets, which will end in Gandhinagar in Gujarat, on September 19.

The Campaign for Survival and Dignity, a federation of adivasi and forest people's organisations from across the country, has been puffing pressure for three years for securing forest rights to tribal people. The Bill envisages, for the first time, recognition of the rights of forest-based communities.

However, even as the Forest Department says this bill will sound the death knell of Indian forests, villages in Melghat and other protected areas are quite keen on having their rights restored to them. The affected people do not seem to have much knowledge of the bill and its provisions. The Bill proposes “to recognise and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest dwelling scheduled tribes who have been residing in such forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded.”

Objection: The Ministry of Environment and Forests has already stated in a note that it does not agree with the introduction of the proposed bill. In a meeting held in January this year, the MoEF said that there is no need to bring in a fresh law as sufficient provisions already exist under the Forest Conservation Act and the guidelines issued in 1990. It also said that the draft bill puts a question mark on the very existence of National Parks and Sanctuaries where the current policy is to shift the habitations outside the protected area as has been done already in the Melghat Tiger Reserve.

Kishore Rithe of the Amravati based Nature Conservation Society said the new bill would regularise encroachments and pave the way for contractors to officially denude forests. The Bombay Natural History

Society (BNHS) has also opposed the bill. The BNHS believes that the Bill in its present form will neither promote forest conservation nor social justice. (Campaign for forest rights to tribal; Immediate tabling of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill demanded, Meena Menon, TH.B, 24.08.05, X14 / X20a)

A day after violence claimed 13 lives in Kalinga Nagar, serious questions are being raised on the inadequate rehabilitation policy of the Orissa Government which clearly triggered the bloody clash between the tribals and the administration. Even as the incident has sent shock waves and the agitated tribals continue to stage road blockade for the second successive day, the State Government is still undecided about any inquiry. Meanwhile, negotiation for withdrawal of road blockade was continuing. The Government had acquired 2,000 acre of land at Kalinga Nagar, Duburi in 1992 for the industrial complex. As per R&R package drawn up then, the oustees were given Rs 37,000 per acre as compensation. However, no evacuation was made. Of that big chunk, the Tatas were handed over 2,000 acre in December 2004. A total of 760 households were to be ousted by their project. Last year, following continuous protests, the State Government announced an enhanced package which offered Rs 25000 per acre ex-gratis on the original compensation, along with an assurance of one guaranteed job per family. (Day after, Orissa rehab policy under scanner. IE.B, 04.01.06, X14)

The tribals of Kalinga Nagar in Orissa's Jajpur district have taken a vow not to vacate their land to make space for steel plants or other industries. The killing of 12 tribals in police firing recently has steeled their resolve to fight against displacement and loss of livelihoods.

The number of tribals having proof of their land is very small in the region. A vast majority in Chandia and nearby villages could be termed as encroachers of government land as they do not possess land of their own. They lack land rights, as there has been no land settlement in the locality since 1928. The landless tribals are equally involved in the agitation against industrialisation as they have little hope of getting compensation for their eviction.

Highway blocked: Two km away from Chandia, activists of Visthapan Virodhi Janmanch, an organisation of local tribals, are blocking the Daitari-Paradip express highway at Gobarghati since the day of the firing. "The authorities have never taken our demand of adequate compensation and rehabilitation seriously, while many rich people and outsiders have managed to acquire land rights in recent years. Over 80 % of the tribals in the area are landless," said Chakradhar Haiburu, president of the Janmanch. "Through our agitation, we will now take up the plight of the tribals displaced in the past across the State and prevent setting up of new industries in tribal pockets."

The effect of the firing seems to be spreading to other parts of the State. Hundreds of tribals blocked the entry points to Rourkela city demanding that the Rourkela Steel Plant return its surplus land which it had taken from them about 50 years ago. The tribals who started an indefinite economic blockade of the township set at least six vehicles afire on the outskirts of the city. (Kalinga Nagar tribals take vow not to vacate land for industries, Prafulla Das, TH.B, 11.01.06, X14)

Based on a report submitted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Special Rapporteur Chaman Lal on the steps taken by the Karnataka Government for the rehabilitation of tribal families displaced by the Kabini Reservoir and Bandipur National Park projects, the NHRC has expressed its satisfaction with the Government's efforts. Families in and around N. Begur in H.D. Kote taluk of Mysore district were displaced by the construction of the Kabini Reservoir project in early 1970s and the formation of the Bandipur Project Tiger National Park in 1973-74. A status report filed before the commission by the Deputy Commissioner of Mysore on measures for 154 tribal families displaced by the Bandipur Project Tiger National Park shows that the Government has issued certificates of agricultural land and residential plots and beneficiaries' identity cards to them. The Government has taken steps to construct two residential layouts for them and deposited Rs. 11.80 lakhs for power connections in the layouts. (NHRC happy with rehabilitation efforts, TH.B, 04.02.06, X14)

Alienating large tracts of tribal land without consulting the tribals, in the name of development, was a clear violation of the rights vested in the 5th Schedule of the Constitution, said Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat. The Ministry of Environment was clearing a number of projects without protecting the basic rights of tribals, which would be raised in Parliament. She said that the issue was discussed at the party Tribal Committee in New Delhi. "In Jharkhand, the State Government has entered into 42 memoranda of understanding to alienate large extents of land for setting up even private projects," she

said. 'The Tatas have even a clause in the MoU, which does not permit the Government to give out details of the land alienation, those fully annulling the basic motive of the Information Act,' Ms. Karat said. Tribals were being given a raw deal in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, she said. Referring to the Polavaram irrigation project as disastrous, she said that 3,725 hectares of prime forestland would get submerged, but environment clearance was given in just two days. (Projects cleared in violation of tribal rights, says Brinda Karat, TH.C, 20.02.06, X14)

X20a Acts, Bills, Ordinances

Some of the greenfield special economic zones (SEZ) in the country that had been languishing for lack of regulatory clarity are getting active again with the SEZ Act set to get the nod soon.

Scrapping the 'sunset clause' mooted by the Finance Ministry will pave the way for smooth flow of FDI. The Commerce Ministry had been supporting the industry's stance on this issue, and the impasse could be solved only with the intervention of the Prime Minister's office.

As per the SEZ Bill, which was cleared, an income tax holiday spanning 15 years has been proposed, where the first five years is 100 % tax free and the ensuing blocks of five years each will have partial and conditional tax holidays. While it is still shy of 20 years as demanded by the industry, it was only too glad to take it. (SEZ Act to pave way for FDI flow, Vinod Mathew, BL.B, 07.05.05, X20a)

Much is spoken about the proposed Tribal Bill's concern for welfare of schedule tribes. The Left parties are unhappy with Union United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government for not introducing the Bill in Parliament. In reality, the Bill is neither going to help the tribes nor will give them rights over the land they dwell on. On the one hand, the Bill will destroy whatever forests remain in the country, while making the tribes continue to live in sub-human conditions. Worse is that it will spell doom to wildlife, which is protected only in three to four % of the land of the country? Interestingly, neither wildlife biologists nor forest conservationists were involved in preparing the Bill. While the sociologists argue for 'harmonious co-existence of tribes' and 'sustainable development', in reality, 80 % of the land has been utilised by human beings. Besides, over 16 % of the remaining land is not protected. For the wildlife, the only solution is complete isolation and protection. This would also help conserve the last tract of 'sustainable land'. The Bill contravenes various Forest Acts. There are a lot of contradictions within the proposed draft Bill itself, which, while allowing collection of minor forest produces (MFP) for 'livelihood of tribes', it prohibits their use for commercial purposes. No one knows how non-commercial collection of MFP will improve the lives of tribes. (Tribal Bill: Where sociologists take over forests, Vinay Madhav, IE.B, 07.06.05, X20a)

With wildlife enthusiasts and tribal rights activists divided on the proposed Bill to recognise tribals' right on forest land, the Ministry of Environment is drafting an alternative Bill to tone down the existing one. Those opposed to the existing Bill prepared by the Tribal Affairs Ministry say that if the hold of tribals on forest land is strengthened, it will interfere with wildlife conservation. The decision to draft the new Bill was taken at a recent meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Tribal Affairs. The two Bills will be compared before one is accepted.

The Environment Ministry's alternative deviates from the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill 2005 on three key points: It puts a cap on the total amount of land that would be given to tribals. The previous Bill had no limit. The new Bill will not include wildlife sanctuaries and protected forests in the land claims. It will, however, endow livelihood rights to those living on forest margins. (Ministry works on 2nd tribal land Bill, Nirmala Ganapathy, IE.C, 15.09.05, X20a)

Promising that a new Bill to protect the rights of the unorganised labour sector in the country would soon be introduced in Parliament, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi said the Centre was confident of solving the problems of the working class in the country. "We are also considering a pension scheme for the aged and women in this sector, as well as schemes such as health insurance". The Congress president cited statistics, saying, in Maharashtra, only 10% of the labour class worked in the organised sector and stressed that unless they got proper wages and their problems were not solved, the country's progress would not be complete. (Unorganised Sector Bill coming: Sonia, ET.B, 24.02.06, X20a)

X21 India's Development

This year, as the first five-year review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals approaches, India can be proud of its accomplishments. In January, the Millennium Project report announced that India was on a better track than several other developing countries to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015. India's commitment to reducing poverty is reflected in the numerous initiatives it has taken, leading to the progress made over the last decades. Three-fourths of India's poor population, or 193 million people, live in rural areas. Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are among the poorest in India and constitute 40 % of the internally displaced population. These groups, and especially women, suffer a higher incidence poverty, greater vulnerability and lower social status than others. Targeting rural poverty, particularly among Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, and women, will better enable India to reach its full development potential in a sustainable manner. (Enabling rural folk to overcome poverty, Lennart Båge, TH.C, 09.05.05, X21)

Even as India appears to be at the forefront in terms of economic growth, it continues to lag in the quality of life as measured by its Human Development Index; it remains unchanged at a low 127 among 177 countries. In comparison, the United Nations' Human Development Report 2005 has a word of praise for neighbouring Bangladesh in view of the rapid human development it has achieved in spite of its moderate growth. Despite its low ranking in the HDI carried out each year by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India, however, has shown progress in HDI valuation, having gone up from .595 last year to .602 in this year's report.

No decline in poverty: The UNDP report on human development has clearly brought out the fact that while India has moved ahead and joined the premier league of world economic growth, the accelerated growth has not resulted in a commensurate decline in poverty. On the Human Poverty Index (HPI-I), it is still ranked at 58 among 103 developing countries. (India still behind in human development: U.N. report, TH.B, 09.09.05, X21)

X22a Right to Information

A path-breaking bill seeking to provide right to information was passed by the Lok Sabha amidst an opposition boycott with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserting the measure would see the dawn of a new era in governance and eliminate the scourge of corruption.

Intervening in the discussion on Right to Information Bill, 2005, Singh said everyone, including civil servants, should see the measure in a "positive spirit" and "not as a draconian law for paralysing government". The PM wanted the bureaucracy to consider the bill as an instrument for improving government citizen interface resulting in a friendly, caring and effective government. The bill was passed by a voice vote after government got 150 amendments to the draft approved by the house. The PM said the Right to Information Bill was "more far-reaching and effective" than the existing Freedom of Information Act. "It has the widest possible reach covering central and state governments, Panchayati Raj institutions, local bodies and recipients of government grants," he said. (LS nod for Right to Information Bill, VT.B, 12.05.05, X22a)

Ratanjan village, over 50 km from here, in Maharashtra was recently in the news. About 50 persons sat on a hunger strike in front of the Taluka Agriculture Office at Barshi earlier this month demanding information on the schemes implemented in their village under the Employment Guarantee Scheme. In May, the villagers had sought information under the Maharashtra Right to Information Act (MRTI) on nallah bunding, farm ponds, contour bunds and other works going on in the village. However, it was not given to them. This gave rise to suspicion that all was not well. There were complaints of inflated muster rolls, fudged payments and false work records. Under the MRTI, information has to be provided within 15 working days failing which the officer concerned is liable to be penalized. (Right to information eludes villagers, Under the Maharashtra Act. information has to be provided to people within 15 working days, Meena Menon, TH.B, 22.09.05, X22a)

X32 Women and Law, Violence against Women

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill cleared by the cabinet is long overdue and path-breaking in many ways. For the first time, lawmakers have widened the definition of 'domestic violence' to include verbal, emotional and economic violence. The Bill also covers relationships outside marriage. But we can't be complacent, because experience shows that laws alone cannot counter violence against women. In India, the response to domestic violence has been to reassert women's responsibility for policing men's

violence. Few efforts have taken up the challenge of 'primary prevention'; interventions intended to stop men and boys from using aggression. Without a radical goal to eliminate rather than respond to male violence against women, prevention tends to be directed towards victims or potential victims. Empowering women is not enough to combat domestic violence. To break the cycle of violence, we need to move beyond an emphasis on women's responsibilities and strike at the root cause: gender socialisation. We have to involve men and the young to combat domestic violence in India. (Rambos Not Wanted At Home, Domestic violence Bill necessary, but not sufficient, Malini Sen, TOI.B, 05.07.05, X32 / X20a)

X40 Children

The Centre released a national plan of action for children, its goals ranging from ending female foeticide to abolishing child labour. Action Plan 2005, which lists goals and strategies in 12 key areas, is an update of a similar plan drafted in 1992. It aims at eliminating child labour from hazardous occupations by 2007, and "progressively move" towards its complete eradication. Children below 10 should be removed from the workforce by 2010. (Centre releases national action plan for children, AA.B, 21.08.05, X40)

X41 Child Rights

Draft Children's Rights Bill, 2005, copies of which have been circulated among legislators and general public for eliciting their views and suggestions on it, has proposed to introduce several clauses, including the rights of the child for education and health, prohibition of child labour, protection against child abuse and constituting a State Commission for Children to oversee the implementation of the provisions of the Act and constitution of a special court for children.

According to Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil, who is instrumental in preparing the draft with assistance from legal experts in the State, the Bill if introduced in the Assembly will set a trend.

The rights of children enshrined in the Bill are to enjoy childhood, learn according to his taste, skill and talent, and no individual or institution shall interfere with their basic freedom. The Bill has provided special clauses to protect girl child against any kind of discrimination and no girl will be denied access to education, minimum level of nutrition, access to health services, and exploited in household activities as unpaid labour. All forms of violence against girl child - physical and mental are prohibited. The Government will formulate and enforce a regulation called Child Code to lay the norms of behaviour and interaction of adults, especially, use of slang and abuse in conversation with children. The Government will establish child police stations after the Act is enacted to safeguard children from criminals. The police will be sensitized to the issue of child abuse, he added. (Draft Bill for ensuring special rights of child, If the Bill is introduced in the State Assembly, It will set a trend, says H.K. Patil, T V Sivanandan, TH.B, 29.08.05, X41)

X42 Child Labour

The Andhra Pradesh government has confirmed that the menace of child labour is rampant in the state. Officials have established that in the cotton seed farms in Adoni in Kurnool about 31,000 minor children are engaged. Further, among these children include a large number of girls. This apart, the government has found that engagement of child labour is growing in four districts including Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Kurnool and Mahboobnagar. Children below the age of 14 years including girls were being exploited in various unskilled services at restaurants, grocery shops, farm lands, plastic manufacturing, agri-processing etc. Besides, they are being engaged as domestic servants in the state, a government survey pointed out.

According to an estimate, there are about 40,000-child labour in Nandyal and another 45,000 in Kurnool area. (Menace of child labour rampant in Andhra, FE.B, 24.05.05, X42)

In response to a query by the National Human Rights Commissions (NHRC) the Maharashtra Government has agreed to submit a report in two weeks detailing its course of action against employers using child labour. A senior official in the Chief Secretary's office confirmed that the NHRC notice, which followed the recent detection of over 400 child labourers by the Mumbai police, had been sent to the Departments of Labour and Women and Child Welfare. On June 1, the Mumbai Police rescued 465 child labourers working in various industrial units, including shoe making, bag making, zari and buffing. The raids were conducted with the help of the "Say No to Child Labour Task Force, a coalition of 46 NGOs. Following the rescue operation, the NGOs collected information from the children regarding their hometowns and employers. (Report on child labour soon; Move follows NHRC notice to Maharashtra, TH.B, 12.06.05, X42)

■ Z – MISCELLANEOUS ■

Z10 NGOs

The Orissa government is contemplating blacklisting some non-government organisation (NGOs) in the state which it says are posing hurdles in the ongoing industrialisation process on the pretext of social and environment issues. A confidential note prepared by the state home department has recommended debarring at least four non-government organisations that are perceived to be involved in anti-industry activities in tribal pockets. The non-government organisations on the firing line are Rayagada-based Agramee, Ankuran, Laxman Naik society of Rural Development and Weaker Sections Integrated Development Agency. The home department has recommended that the government stop all grants to these four non-government organisations and ask the centre to cancel their licences under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

It may be noted that, eager to accelerate the process of industrialisation, the Orissa government has signed up steel, aluminium and alumina plants in the past one year.

Some of the projects are in remote tribal belts where these non-government organisations are mostly active. The state has lost a few projects in the past to protracted agitation by tribals backed by the non-government organisations. (Orissa plans to ban anti-industry NGOs, Dillip Satapathy, BL.B, 30.06.05, Z10)

Central Social Welfare Board president Rajani Patil said the Board would set up a task force to monitor NGOs. She said more than 20,000 NGOs come under the Board, of which the State accounts for 794. It receives complaints against NGOs and their office-bearers, she said. (Task force to monitor NGOs, IE.B, 06.01.06, Z10)

■ TSR – TSUNAMI ■

General

To prevent a decline in the number of tourists visiting India after tsunami, the Government is taking up with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) the issue of refraining from describing the country as an unsafe destination. Union Tourism Minister Renuka Chaudhury said 'we are taking up the matter with the WTO in Spain and also take up with those countries which had posted an 'advisory' in websites cautioning its citizens against travelling to India, particularly the north eastern region in view of insurgency'. Ms Chaudhary said her Ministry had written to the Union Home Ministry to review its restricted area permit (RAP) policy prevalent in some parts of the north east, to enable more tourists to visit those areas. (Tourism advisories: India to take up matter with world body, FE.B, 16.04.05, TSR)

The International Finance Corporation, the World Bank Group's private sector financing arm, has said that it will provide upto to \$150 million as loans to companies that can help reconstruct commercial tourism ventures in tsunami-affected countries in South Asia and South-east Asia. The loans will be granted on commercial terms and are aimed at established hotel companies that require capital for reconstruction or refinancing, an IFC press release said. It said the firms should be committed to sound social and environmental policies with a positive track record in operations and a portfolio of properties catering to different segments of the market. (IFC to support tsunami tourism, AA.D, 16.05.05, TSR)

Keeping up with the National Common Minimum Programme's promise of providing a government that is 'transparent and accountable at all times', Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has come out with a report, Tsunami - a report to the nation. The report, released recently, details the amount received and spent on tsunami-related rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the country, as also how far the work has progressed in the affected states.

The estimated total package for tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction was Rs 11,907.29 crore, of which Rs 3,644.05 crore came from the special Rajiv Gandhi Rehabilitation Package approved by the Centre, Rs 3,610.35 crore was received from multilateral agencies and distributed among states, and Rs.4,652.89 came from other sources, like Plan assistance, banks, financial institutions etc. (PM releases tsunami-related aid, rehabilitation report, FE.B, 06.06.05, TSR)

Along the famous white sands of Phuket's Patong beach, stray dogs outnumber tourists, who six months after the tsunami are still staying away from the once packed shore. Although tourism officials in India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives are cautiously optimistic about the future, visitors remain reluctant to visit Thailand's beaches, where half the tsunami victims are believed to be foreign holiday-makers. Thai authorities admit tourism has been slower to rebound than they had hoped, and industry officials say they expect the coming peak travel season starting in November to be weaker than normal, with a full recovery possible by late 2006. Thailand's national economy has absorbed the shock even as it sputters on high oil prices, but tsunami-hit provinces are paying a high price. Official numbers for the first quarter of the year paint a dire picture: arrivals of Swedes and Britons, who usually visit in greater numbers than other nationalities, are down by 67% over the same period last year.

German tourists have dropped off by 74% and French 70%. Asian tourists are also staying away: arrivals of South Koreans are down by 64% and Japanese by 86%. (Tourism's slow recovery along tsunami-hit beaches, FE.C, 20.06.05, TSR)

One year on, most of the affected resorts have achieved an impressive turnaround, and some are even better than before. "Most hotels that were hit, certainly in Sri Lanka, took the time to make significant developments and, as a result, clients are experiencing a much better holiday than before the tsunami," said Louise Newton of Sri Lanka specialist Somak Holidays.

Repairing the damage to tourists' perceptions of the region has been harder. Hotels may have been quick to re-open, but tourists have been slower to return, particularly to areas that took a direct hit, leaving many properties with empty rooms for much of last year.

The Andaman coast of Thailand had 15 to 20 % fewer visitors from key regions such as the UK last year than in 2004, while visitor numbers to the Maldives were up to 25 % down for the first 10 months of last year and Sri Lanka suffered a 7 % drop.

Resorts on the Andaman coast, which suffered terrible damage, have made a remarkable recovery. Most hotels in Phuket, the largest resort affected, have reopened, some after extensive refurbishment.

However, in nearby Khao Lak, which was just finding its feet as a holiday destination when the tsunami struck, it's a different story. The death toll there topped 2,000, and several hotels were destroyed. The prestigious Anantara, for instance, will not be rebuilt. Britons have been slow to return to the whole of the Andaman coast. Visitor numbers to Thailand as a whole were up 5 % in 2005, but numbers to the Andaman area were down by 15 to 20 %.

The Bay of Bengal bore the brunt of the tidal wave, so the country's main tourist destinations survived relatively unscathed. The southern tip of the coastal state of Kerala and the Andaman Islands were hit, but the tourist resorts were not affected.

UK arrivals were up about 16 % last year, partly due to the launch of a tranche of new flights by British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Air India and Jet Airways. Air fares have fallen as a result. Thirty-two of the 72 resorts in the Maldives were affected by the tsunami, but only 15 are still closed. Only one of the flooded resorts, the Club Med Farukolhufushi, will not reopen.

The islands have been given a wide berth by the Italians, Germans and Japanese since the tsunami but the British have been more resilient. The tsunami has done nothing to deter investment in the Maldives, where the loss of lives was relatively small, and several new resorts are due to open this year and next. A new luxury yacht, the Rania, which can be hired with its own private island, has already been launched, and Four Seasons will open a second luxury hotel in the Maldives in February.

Malaysia suffered only slight damage, having been largely shielded by the island of Sumatra. Damage in Penang, such as sand in swimming pools, flooded restaurants and debris on beaches, was quickly cleaned up. (Tsunami one year on: Tourist resorts achieve a remarkable turnaround, Linsey McNeill, BL.B, 02.01.06, TSR)

In the aftermath of last year's cataclysmic tsunami, Dr. Gregory Stone of the New England Aquarium co-led an expedition to survey the damage caused to Thailand's coral reefs.

As reported in a recently released technical report available on the New England Aquarium website and in December's issue of National Geographic, the expedition's results indicate a quick recovery for most of the reefs.

The dive tourism industry is a major part of the region's economy and locally caught fish are a primary source of protein in the diet of the people in the region. The coral reefs there are among the most beautiful in the world.

An international team of eight scientist-divers, led by Dr. Gregory Stone of Boston and Dr. Gerald Allen of Australia, travelled to the coast of Thailand approximately three and a half months after the tsunami struck in order to rapidly assess the extent of damage to reefs.

After more than 500 dives at 56 sites, though the team found plenty of damage, there appears to be reason for optimism. Of the reefs assessed, 36 % showed very little to no damage, while 50 percent showed a moderate amount of tsunami-related damage. Only 14 % of the surveyed reefs had suffered severe damage. The scientific team concluded that the rare devastation of the tsunami was less of a long-term threat to the

coral reefs than ongoing human-caused damage such as over-fishing, poorly planned coastal development and global warming. (Tsunami: coral reefs can recover quickly, TH.B, 06.01.06, TSR)

Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation has brought out a colourful brochure as a post-tsunami update to instil confidence in travellers. According to the brochure, all temples in the tsunami-hit areas are unaffected; beach resorts in Mamallapuram on the East Coast Road stretch, which were affected by the tsunami are functioning again; there was no loss of life of foreign tourists; most of the major tourist attractions in the State are located inland and were not affected; and new monuments were unearthed at Mamallapuram after the tsunami. The pamphlet has pictures of treasures unearthed from the sea by the tsunami at Mamallapuram, the mangrove forest of Pichavaram, the Danish Fort at Tranquebar (Tarangambadi), the Velankanni Church in Nagapattinam, and the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari and the Pamban Bridge at Rameswaram. It also has pictures of many overseas tourists arriving by luxury liners after the tsunami. (Brochure to allay fears of tourists, T.S. Shankar, TH.C, 05.05.05, TSR)

With a view to revitalise the economy of the tsunami-ravaged districts, TN chief minister J Jayalalithaa has sought a 10-year exemption from excise duties on goods manufactured by new industrial units which operate in the affected region. In a letter to the Prime Minister, she also requested a three-year exemption from excise duties on steel, cement, pipes and other construction materials used for establishing new industrial units in the tsunami affected districts. She drew a parallel, wherein the Centre had issued similar orders granting excise duty exemption to excisable goods manufactured by new industrial units in Kutch which was devastated by a massive earthquake on January 26, 2001. (Jaya seeks 10 year excise holiday in tsunami-hit areas, TOI.B, 08.06.06, TSR / M11)

The Pondicherry government has chalked out several plans for promoting ethnic-cum-lifestyle based tourism at the tsunami-ravaged coastal hamlets of the Union territory. According to relief and rehabilitation commissioner B V Selvaraj, every settlement which has been created under the Tsunami Rehabilitation Project would be provided with a strong interface for promoting lifestyle based tourism having lively interaction with the fishing and coastal communities. Proper landscaping would be done in these hamlets and cottages would be constructed in such a way that the infrastructure would encourage foreign and domestic tourists to visit these villages. The entire activity is being consciously developed as a part of providing alternate and diversified vocation for young fishermen. Moreover, the ethnic-cum-lifestyle based tourism would be eco-friendly and employment intensive. Detailing the tsunami rehabilitation work, he said that till now, 13 non-government organisations and the government of Maharashtra have been working in closely with the Pondicherry government to construct 4,997 houses for tsunami-affected victims in 22 settlements. (Now, tsunami hamlets to be tourist spots, AA.D, 27.02.06, TSR)

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Environmentalists have slammed a tourism deal by India's tsunami-hit Andaman islands with Thailand, saying such a move would destroy its fragile ecology and encourage the sex trade. The Dec. 26 tsunami killed thousands of people on India's remote Andaman and Nicobar islands, caused massive environmental damage and decimated the small tourism industry in the rain forest-covered islands ringed by coral reefs. In a move to breathe new life into the shattered economy, authorities signed a five-year deal in June with the resort town of Phuket in Thailand, famous for its beaches but also for a burgeoning sex trade. The deal would allow tourists visiting Phuket to take a short flight to the Andamans. But environmentalists warned the islands' infrastructure as well as its ecology could not cope with a big number of tourists. (Environmentalists flay India's Thai tourism plan, FE.B, 04.08.05, TSR)

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has said it will provide at least one daily wage job for a year to each family affected by the tsunami. About 6,313 families have been identified for the scheme after a door-to-door survey was conducted. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced lifting of the ban on recruitment in the Union Territory to fill the 650 vacant Government posts. He said there would be an increase in the number of anganwadi workers. The administration has also drawn an action plan for agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and rural development. (Manmohan announces livelihood plans for Andaman and Nicobar, Aarti Dhar, TH.B, 06.01.06, TSR)

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| Code | Newspaper |
|--|------------------------------|
| BL.B | Business Line, Bangalore |
| FE.B | Financial Express, Bangalore |
| ET.B | Economic Times, Bangalore |
| IE.B | Indian Express, Bangalore |
| AA.B | Asian Age, Bangalore |
| DH.B | Deccan Herald, Bangalore |
| TOI.B | Times of India, Bangalore |
| VT.B | Vijay Times, Bangalore |
| TH.B | The Hindu, Bangalore |
| AA.D | Asian Age, Delhi |
| FE.D | Financial Express, Delhi |
| ET.D | Economic Times, Delhi |
| IE.D | Indian Express, Delhi |
| TOI.D | Times of India, Delhi |
| TH.D | The Hindu, Delhi |
| HT.D | Hindustan Times, Delhi |
| TP.D | The Pioneer, Delhi |
| TS.D | The Telegraph, Delhi |
| IE.C | Indian Express, Chennai |
| FE.C | Financial Express, Chennai |
| ET.C | Economic Times, Chennai |
| BL.C | Business Line, Chennai |
| HE.G | The Herald, Goa |
| GT.G | Gomatak Times, Goa |
| NT.G | Navhind Times, Goa |
| Readers are welcome to write to us for any of the materials listed in the Update, though we would request for a contribution towards photocopy and mailing expenses. | |

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- X14 Human Rights of Tribes
- X15 Autonomy and self-rule Movements
- X20 Society and Indian Society
 - X20a Acts, Bills, ordinances
(General)
- X21 Development - India's
development, including social
movements
- X22 human rights (General)
 - X22a Right to information
- X23 ideology, socialism, communism,
nationalism
- X24 colonialism
- X30 Gender and Feminist Theory
- X31 Status of Women (General)
- X32 Women and Law, Violence against
Women -analytical
 - X33 Women's Work/Women
Workers
- X34 Women and Development
(schemes, national commission on
women etc)
- X35 Women's Movement and
Organisation (main focus on India)
- X40 Children
- X41 Child Rights
- X42 Child Labour (non-tourism)
- X60 History/Indian History

Z MISCELLANEOUS

- Z00 Statistics (General)
- Z10 NGOs
- Z80 Cartoons
- Z90 Miscellaneous

Established in 1985, EQUATIONS is a research, campaigning and advocacy organisation charged with a vision of democratising tourism.

We believe that the alternatives to the current models of mass tourism are viable and have demonstrated this in innovative partnerships that place local communities' needs and rights at the center of decision-making and benefits of tourism development.

We build networks of people—grassroots organisations, local communities, panchayats and local self governance bodies, activists, researchers, trade unions, legal and policy experts—who are concerned, as we are, with ensuring that tourism planning, policy and implementation is equitable, people-centred and just.

In the last two decades, our work has focused on the impacts arising out of unregulated and irresponsible tourism development in India and the developing world. We do this through research, information analysis and dissemination, campaigns, advocacy and lobbying. We actively support communities and local groups in their efforts to change the paradigm of unjust and unsustainable tourism development.

The DocUpdate is a compilation of media reports and research articles on tourism and development issues. The publication aims to provide an analytical perspective to the debate on tourism and development and is useful for researchers, tourism institutes and activists.